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NAPOLEON

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NAPOLEON

By ÉLIE FAURE

Translated by
JEFFERY E. JEFFERY

"I command, or I am silent"

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To
THE MAN
WHOEVER HE MAY BE
AMONG THE LEADERS OF THE UNIVERSAL REVOLUTION
WHATEVER FORM IT MAY TAKE
WHO
WILL POSSESS THE DIVINE VIRTUE
OF BEING ABLE TO IMPOSE UPON IT
THE ORDER
WHICH IT WILL ESTABLISH
IN
HIS HEART

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I

Enlightenment

FROM the point of view of morality he is indefensible. Indeed, he is incomprehensible. In actual fact, he violated the law, he killed, he sowed vengeance and death. Yet he made the law, he tracked crime to its source and crushed it, he established order everywhere. He was an assassin ; he was also a redresser of wrongs. As an ordinary person, he would have deserved to be hanged. But in his supreme position he was unsullied ; he distributed rewards and punishments with a firm hand. He was a monster—double-faced. Like all of us, perhaps. In any case, like God.

Scarcely anyone has realized that ; neither his detractors nor his supporters. It is in the name of morality that every one attacks him or defends him : a task which is easier in the former case than in the latter. But morality is narrower than life—and less complex. Unlike life, it does not carry in its tragic texture those sublime contradictions which by continuous opposition to each other create the substance of a hero and prevent him from being either more or less than a man.

From the point of view of art, everything about him becomes clear. He was a poet of action. That is all. And if I go further, it is either because I am too fond of the sound of my own voice, or because I realize, or at least am afraid, that mankind misunderstands him. Like all artists, he was capable of making mistakes in his art, and from the moral angle these are regarded as crimes. But his work as a whole is as astonishing as any ever conceived by an artist. It is as lasting too, because of its spirit, and this quite independently of the comparatively unimportant fact that its material results are already disappearing. It is as decisive as any in the spiritual history of humanity; the most decisive, unquestionably, since that of Christ. Like His, it was immoral because, like His, it overthrew all the social habits and prejudices of an age, dissolved and dispersed families, and precipitated the whole world into an abyss of war, glory, misery and illusion.

From the moral point of view, he is indeed Antichrist. From the point of view of art, he is, with Christ, the only spirit recognized by Prometheus on earth. Each in his own way went to the utmost limit of his powers, towards a goal which was invisible to him and is invisible to us. He was a hero, not a saint. The saint renounces. He suppresses a part of himself in order to attain a share in God—the only part of Him with which he has anything to do. The hero is a conqueror. His whole being marches forward to meet God.

II

The Reverse Side

I

JESUS became a myth, but Napoleon did not. The world did not really begin to concern itself with the Son of Man until a century after His death. He was of the ancient East, where everything is a miracle and a mirage. He lived and spoke and acted outside the observation of the powerful and the perspicacious and amongst very poor people who, being quite uncultured and credulous, and being imbued with a strong leaning towards the supernatural, distorted and exaggerated all that they saw and heard said, and amplified and adapted their account to the point of finding a symbol in it and giving that symbol significance. After His death there was no controllership, no means of obtaining information, no authentic documents; there was nothing but a childish account passed piecemeal from mouth to mouth and from imagination to imagination, and leaving in existence nothing of the primitive reality (the defects of which had dropped away like slag and cinders from the flame of a volcano), but a marvellous romance which expressed, in reality, no more than the sentimental needs of the suffering and sacrificed half of the ancient world. He was dressed up as the Angel of Good. His deeds were seen only in their general sense and as a whole.

But with the other, the contrary was the case. Only the details and the accident were seen. As the Angel of Evil, he was stripped naked. In this connection, no one, it seems to me, has been prepared to analyse the pregnant phrase which Napoleon himself inscribed as a preliminary to any knowledge of human beings: "*Men, like pictures, must be seen in a favourable light.*"[1] A ferocious, implacable and vigilant criticism, which even before his advent had been sharp enough to have become a conspicuous characteristic of the century, surrounded him and followed him in order to spy upon his every action, upon the least significant as well as upon the most important, and analysed his every deed, not only in the period of his greatness, but in the far-back, unimportant days of his obscure childhood. In the life of a nonentity, vices and defects are barely visible and interest no one. If they are perceived at all, they blend with the grey uniformity of his personality. But in the resplendent life of a man placed alone upon a pinnacle, in a life which excites the passionate curiosity of all his contemporaries and of all posterity, and is so powerfully illuminated that the least shadow, even when it is coloured and in movement, appears to be of vital importance, vices and defects attract attention and seem black, fixed and indelible, like the spots on the sun. At a little distance these spots still stand out. But that is the view of the little mind—of a mind which confronts a picture by the brush of a master and can only see that a finger is badly placed or that the hair has been made too thick or that the mouth is badly drawn. He who is too close to a great thing grasps only the points of resemblance to himself in it—that is to say, its more paltry, common elements. He follows up eagerly whatever there is in it to reduce it to his own level. Even when it attracts him he puts himself on his guard as he approaches it. He looks to its ugly side so that he may recognize therein his own worst qualities. He has no idea of how much he is magnifying the hero when by a careful scrutiny of the hero's life he undertakes to prove that the hero was a man.

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[1] Let me be excused from giving references. Every quotation from Napoleon, whether collected from contemporary memoirs, his works, his correspondence, or any other source, is in italics in the text.

One historian will reproach Napoleon for having at the age of eight beaten one of his brothers; another for having groaned and given vent to cries of anger at a time when he was plunged deep in an abyss of physical and mortal pain. Characteristics of his were a certain demeanour of impulsive vivacity, an inclination to indulge in a brusque sally, a mood of impatience which flared up in him and then was instantly extinguished; people regarded these —or at least chose so to regard them—as fixed principles of his, as irremediable meannesses of character, as calculated wickedness. He could not isolate himself as can a man of thought, pure and simple. He was in the centre of whatever was happening—that is to say, he was surrounded at all hours of the day by fools and menials and rogues. A painter mingling with the crowd in a picture-gallery mentally registers as imbeciles those people whose opinions he overhears. Napoleon frequently did the same —but out loud. It was his way of expressing himself. It is the way in which powerful natures whose thoughts and deeds are almost simultaneous, and who take it ill if one cannot understand them and follow them without hesitation, do express themselves. He possessed, admittedly, the spirit of contradiction to an extreme degree, as do all men whose personal opinions are firmly and logically fixed and who feel them, even with persons who share their views, to be floating upon the surface of some common prejudice. Sometimes he was silent. Sometimes, too, he would exchange with his *entourage* the ordinary banalities which all of us utter but which, since they came from his mouth, were piously collected and preserved. Has there ever been a great man who delivered himself defenceless to all his questioners? Spinoza did not discuss with his water-carrier the questions he discussed with Descartes. With simple-minded men Napoleon discussed at length matters with which they were familiar. As for the fools, he amused himself by startling them with paradoxes. Occasionally he would behave like an irritated fencer, who by the rapidity of his thrusts and parries makes his adversary lose his foothold and, hiding his ill-humour, abandon the contest. Roederer records these whims of his—I believe he even uses the very word "whim." But the others could not see through them, or at any rate recorded them ineptly.[1]

"*You always take everything so seriously,*" said Napoleon impatiently to Gourgaud. And it was the latter, poor man, who one day, when he was less gloomy than usual, wrote:

"His Majesty treats me with all possible friendliness—and playfully boxes my ears."

Far too much has been made of these soldierly cuffs. Coming from him, they were no more than the sign of his joy and of his mute contentment; he had little notion of how to talk to simpletons—who would not have understood him! Imagine the story of Jesus written by a Pharisee. I am quite sure that Napoleon never pinched Goethe's ear! But a certain type of highly superior intellect elects thus to express itself to children whom it likes but to the level of whose troubles and language it does not know how to reduce itself. A tweak of the nose or the ears, a little pull at the hair—but can one, as regards Napoleon, re-write history on that account? Was this gesture of his really so wicked? It consisted, Bourrienne tells us, "in giving a person a tap or two with his first and second fingers or in gently pinching the lobe of his ear." And when he called someone a booby, or a ninny, or a fool, "he never," says Bourrienne again, "used the words in their literal sense, and the tone in which he pronounced them showed that their significance was entirely friendly." Moreover, when he snapped at anyone and saw afterwards that he had upset him, he immediately repented. "He would never allow anyone to quarrel with him!"[1]

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[1] See Appendix. Note I.

But when jeremiads lasted a long time, when someone with a grievance definitely refused to understand the situation, or when someone demanded more than his due—which meant simply the protection, kindliness and affection that is normally given to a familiar pet which one teases sometimes or fondles between its walk and its dinner—then his chaff ceased abruptly and a sharp phrase pushed the offender back into his place. One day when he was worn out with the stupid reproaches and childish lamentations of Gourgaud, who was almost the only person with him on the scorching island, he said: "*You thought when you came here that you would be my comrade. . . . I am no man's comrade. No one can assume control over me.*"

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[1] Bourrienne.

2

He was suspicious, certainly. He felt himself to be of rare quality. Contact with the rustic or the worldly-minded wounded him cruelly. From this point of view his childhood, and his whole youth in fact, were atrocious. Everything caused him suffering: his Corsican accent, which people laughed at; his name, which was distorted; his peculiar manners—like those of a little savage caught in a trap; his peculiar features, which were regarded as unpleasant and sickly; his shabby uniform, threadbare with brushing and ironing. A burning sense of pride consumed him, drawing his eyes into their sockets, pinching in his nose, curling his lips, imprisoning him in a gloomy silence behind which all his nerves, stretched taut like cords, made his heart contract in order to nourish with its substance the banked-down fire of his spirit. He paid for all that later on. He became an incurable neurasthenic. He suffered from headaches, biliousness, dyspepsia. He was affected by smells, colours, noises and intemperateness, like an artist or a woman.

His blotchy, spotted features twitched, his fingers were always fidgeting, his legs were unsteady, his gait jerky. He could be quickly disgusted and easily fatigued. Yet he was capable of gigantic efforts ; he could leave his own horsemen behind after thirty hours in the saddle. Always he would gallop on, soaked through, or scorched with heat, or blue with cold, arriving alone at his journey's end, eating but little, and that in a hurry when he remembered to do so, and sleeping when he could find time.

Suspicious ? Yes—as suspicious as an eagle finding itself amongst a flock of geese. He felt his superiority, but he was too proud to speak of it. He desired to prove it first. He was not made for insipidity nor yet for airs and graces. "*His keen imagination, his fiery heart, his severe judgment, his cold mind, could not but be annoyed by the greetings of coquettes, by the subtleties of an intrigue, by the logic of gambling tables and by the morals of coxcombs.*" [1] I can well believe it. Everything caused him suffering : because everything with which he came in contact belittled or soiled the vision of greatness which he was building up within himself ; because no one round him could appreciate his secret power ; because people smiled when he came into a room and muttered in corners as they looked across at him; because women stared at him and pouted disdainfully. Or, at least, because he imagined all these things. I can well believe it. The contempt which he had for men, the desire which he had for women, made him timid and surly. Abrupt and uncontrolled fits of geniality, or of unrestrained grief, or of an ill-concealed wish to impress some questioner or other, would sometimes make him lacking in tact. He was lacking in tact, as a poet of genius is very often lacking in taste. He had little knowledge of the usages of the world because the empire of the world lay within the confines of his heart.

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[1] An exception—the only one, I hope. The sentence is taken from a projected novel, *Elison et Eugénie*, which Napoleon conceived in his youth. The manuscript was subsequently found in Poland.

But observe how, later on, he unbosomed himself in hurried, burning words coming as though from some fire within him that he could no longer keep in check. After the Italian epoch, people knew well enough who he was. No more smiles when he appeared, no more whisperings in corners; and if women looked at him, it was with eagerness. He spoke, then, but as a master. He became a captivating, seductive, dominating person for those who knew how to listen, for those who wanted to understand—and also for the simple-minded who had no need either to listen or to understand, but who followed in his wake like dust in the wind. So much the worse for those who knew not how to listen, for those who did not wish to understand—for those whom the accidents of life had deprived of their simplicity. It happened often enough. The personal Calvary went on. Men came to recognize his greatness at the moment through his deeds, but the forces which were working upon him escaped them. He was like a painter who, in following out an idea, is reproached by those round him for not contenting himself with what satisfies them. He felt that his own heart governed the pulsations of the universe. How, then, should he conceive that there could be men in that very universe who did not realize that fact? So he hurried on, he rushed. Having no time to convince them, he asserted—and that was all. It was not a question of discussing with the man of little faith and of little resolution whether it was day or whether it was night. It was a question, rather, of breaking down the gates which hid the sun.

3

Nevertheless, people were astonished at his contempt for his *entourage*. And people reproach him for it. And history is written on those sorry lines. He used these people. He made princes of them. He fed them and decked them out in gold-embroidered raiment. Was that not enough for the poor wretches? What else did they expect of him? For his political needs he made use of Talleyrand or of Fouché; for his military needs, of Masséna or of Soult—plunderers, robbers, impostors, all of them, but in their respective spheres all experts. He held them by the scruff of the neck with his pincers and did not conceal the fact from them. But he stood still one day in front of Goethe, and looking him straight in the eyes, he said: "*You are a man.*" And when, in order to flatter him, people tried to lower his opinion of a certain other man, this was what he replied: "*I have no reproaches to make against Chateaubriand. He resisted me when I was at the height of my power.*"

There dwelt within him a vital force, tormenting him, unable to issue from him except by crushing in and around himself people, things, sentiments and interests which he scarcely saw or did not see at all, because his mind was above them. The truth appeared dazzlingly clear to him and the means to realize it direct. How, then, should he have understood that other people were astonished, that they anxiously discussed those means and made mistakes over them? So he became enervated and irritable, and sometimes a vehement anger, quickly suppressed, took hold of him. It should be noted, however, that it was particularly when his calculations were shaky, when something had gone wrong with their working—he did not know what since he only half realized that their very magnitude put them out of joint—it was only then, between 1809 and 1813, that he became gloomy and irritable and that his mental suffering and his weariness expressed themselves in bitter remarks, frequently quite unjust, which produced and encouraged amongst his lieutenants and those in attendance upon him a wave of anxiety and of revolt against him. At such moments he was terrible. Every one mentions his Olympian anger, his stabbing phrases, the terror that he could spread about him, the unbearable flash of his glance. But every one admits, too, how quick he was to pardon—or, better still, to forget. " Leave him alone," said Duroc, " he says what he feels, not what he thinks, nor yet what he proposes to do to-morrow." [1] He threatened to have everybody shot, but in actual fact no one was shot. He forgave everything, and every one, in all circumstances, to the point of weakness, of blindness—of folly. He never went back, either in deed or word, on a pardon once granted. He did not confine himself to excusing clumsiness, or even disobedience; he forgot treachery. Bernadotte, Victor, Augereau, Bourrienne, and even the Moreau of the Soissons affair who caused him to lose the campaign in France, were not punished. On the evening before Leipzig, he talked quietly to Murat about the latter's secret negotiations with Austria. Soult, who but recently had been a minister under Louis XVIII, and who had just issued a base proclamation against Napoleon, was made his Chief of Staff for the Hundred Days' campaign. When he was informed that Marmont had gone over to the enemy, this was his answer: "*He will be more unfortunate than I shall be.*"

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[1] See Appendix. Note 2.

In reality he had not time to be vindictive: "*One must know how to forgive and one must not persist in a hostile and peevish attitude, which merely wounds one's neighbour and prevents one from enjoying oneself.*" A strong man may curse a stone which he knocks against or a bramble which scratches him, but he forgets both the stone and the bramble a second afterwards. He even forgets that there will be other stones and other brambles on his road. The ability to forget is the most magnanimous of the qualities which we possess. It is also the most prolific. Forgetting is to forgiveness what pity is to justice. It is generous evidence that within us there is a vast ascendancy of those elements of our sensual and spiritual life by means of which we renew our sentiments and our ideals and present ourselves, with our candour intact, before fresh illusions. It is that which maintains in the world the eternal forces of the world's renewal—love, hope, pride, the craving for immortality.

Napoleon's anger, moreover, was often assumed. It was but one instrument amongst those at his disposal. This I definitely assert.

Man, in his eyes, was a child whom he joked with or teased; whom he protected; whom he liked, too, if simple-minded; whom he despised when vile, and of whom he was always a little contemptuous. If a man had no sense, he shouted at him, knowing well enough that a man, like a child, is afraid of a loud voice. He played with his own anger with consummate art, knew just the moment and the occasion to mingle caresses with his threats, and by that means to mislead the diplomat, humble the politician, and make a hero of the soldier. "*My iron hand was not at the end of my arm; it was in my head. Nature had not given it to me; it functioned solely through my own calculations.*"

4

A comedian? Yes—but first of all the meaning of that must be made clear. He was a Corsican; some of his ancestors were Tuscan, and others, probably, were Greek. In all the great men of action of the ancient world—Alcibiades, Hannibal, Alexander, Sulla, Cæsar—there was something of the comedian. The very founders of morality, those who are regarded as having revealed conscience to mankind—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel—clad themselves in cloaks of skins and hung labels round their necks. They gathered dust in their hands and poured it upon their heads and their faces; they uttered guttural lamentations and went through a variety of tricks to attract the attention of the idle mob. Jesus gave sight to the blind and caused the lame to walk. And in my opinion the heroes of the North, in a more modern world, had just as much guile. Cromwell was a comedian of a dour type, Calvin was morose, and Luther sinister and cheerful by turns. The Puritan, the Quaker, the Jesuit, the Jacobin, raised the comedy of morals to the height of a principle of government. Those classical heroes of political virtue, Cincinnatus and Washington, chose as their stage, the one his ploughshare, the other the threshold of his cottage. And all of them, in reality, act the comedy of their pride for our benefit ; all, even the artists who perform their antics, sublime or futile, to amuse the crowd, though the best of them—those who despise it—make grimaces before their mirrors.

In that, then, lies the problem. We are always acting a comedy, but sometimes to ourselves and sometimes to our neighbours. The first way is, I imagine, the more noble ; perhaps, since it presupposes a kind of divine innocence and disinterestedness, it is the only noble one. The excuse for the hero of action, and for Napoleon more than for any other man, is that though he may act a comedy for his neighbours, he acts one for himself which is greater, more lasting, and more poignant ; and that the former, acted for his neighbours, is no more than an inevitable consequence and an ingredient of the latter, whose unfolding and whose immense perspectives he contemplates within himself and whose conclusion, though he follow it till death, he never reaches.

"Comedian . . . tragedian. . . ." He had the world for his theatre. Pope, kings, peoples, the passions of the multitude—they were so many puppets to him; he held the strings, put them on the stage or removed them from it just when he chose. He knew that and he said so. He could not but rejoice in his power! "*King of Naples, go and see if breakfast is ready.*" At Dresden or at Erfurt, in front of an emperor or two, four or five kings, and thirty princes, he said: "*When I was a second-lieutenant in the artillery* . . ." Bewilderment, whispers, scandalized looks! He glared round him with the air of a lion-tamer. "*When I had the honour to be a humble second-lieutenant in the artillery* . . ." And all heads were bowed. . . . On another occasion, when the ante-chamber was full and kings and queens had been announced by their full titles, the double doors were slowly opened—"The Emperor . . ." With nervous tread he came forward, alone amidst a dead silence. Or, again, between a squadron in uniforms of amaranth and gold, with plumes a yard long and accoutrements of shining leather, and twenty field-marshals, with their gold lace and their gorgeous head-dresses, would come a horseman wearing a plain coat and a black hat crushed low on his head—at full gallop, and alone. Comedy? I do not know. A romantic love of contrast, rather. A grandiose feeling for his terrible solitude, doubtless—necessary for the conquest of the vision which was always in flight before him. To Roederer, accompanying him through the lofty and luxurious suites of the Tuileries and remarking on their air of sadness, he replied: "*Yes—like greatness.*"

Comedy presupposes a lie—but also an illusion. The bad comedian is he who lies, the good one is he who is under an illusion. The one loves, the other does not. The greatest artist is only a sublime liar, who sees the visions which he makes of reality conforming to it. Like Shakespeare or Rembrandt, Napoleon believed what he said. But the poet's lie leaves society as a whole on one side. The mass which constitutes human society tries to understand the poet, but it can only perceive his lie. The Philistine, therefore, accuses Shakespeare and Rembrandt of lying. And the Philistine is not wrong. They did lie. But they only lied for the needs of their art; as did Napoleon, whose art, by a chance which was enough to damn him in the eyes of the Philistine, although he was not responsible for it, took mankind for its instrument. In order not to lie to himself, he lied like a poet, or like a lover, or like a creator of myths deriving from the mystic East and desirous of making the future conform to his own emotions. He was dazzled by mirages. And when he lied as regards facts about which no two interpretations were possible, it was in the ingenuous belief that he could thus imbue the hearts of men (who constituted the means for his gigantic enterprise) with the illusions which he himself had about that enterprise and which were indispensable for its realization. The famous Bulletin was only a means of working upon the simple mind of the soldier and so of preserving his essential confidence. Every one lies to the people, especially those who call themselves, and even those who believe themselves to be, its friends. For the people is not capable of hearing the truth ; the moment the truth is told to it, it demands a lie which will set a fresh promise beyond the horror of what is actually true. Napoleon's lies were no more than the echoes of a powerful imagination outside which there was no reality but which was trying to put in agreement with actual events those imaginary events which were being unfolded within his own brain. Except in action —in a picture, a symphony, a poem—they would not have been perceived at all.

His vision—that alone was the truth. Other men's visions had reality for him only if they helped to form his own perception or depended upon it like a shadow or a reflection of the organizing mass round which his work was pivoted and which determined the accent, the character, the movement and the colour of all its other elements. It has been said that he was jealous. That is sheer foolishness, which reveals the accuser himself of being jealous of him. How can there be any question of the composer of a symphony being jealous of one of the first violins who interpret it to the public ? If the composer be present, if he be forgotten, if the applause be given to the virtuoso, above all, if to the virtuoso be attributed the success of a conception of which the composer alone knows the formidable complexity, the mysterious immensity, that infinite wealth of consequence, of development, of vague atmosphere, of movement which it contains—then the composer may be angry, he may even suffer, and naturally enough. With Napoleon, when his own strength was in question, he was unable to realize that any instrument through which he expressed it could mask its royalty. He was willing enough to give such instrument its due—its full due—but *after* his own. And as he knew its worth in his scheme, he loaded it with honours and with gold. It has been said that he took care not to choose for his lieutenants titles corresponding to their personal victories, in order to hide their glories behind the splendour of his own. Unfortunately that is false. Lannes received Montebello as his title; Davout, Auerstadt; Augereau, Castiglione; Ney, Elchingen; Kellermann, Valmy. And may it not be asserted with as much truth that when he bracketed the name of Rivoli with that of Masséna, he attributed the success of that day to Masséna?

After Auerstadt he ordered Davout to be the first to enter Berlin. He was hardly in power before he gave Moreau, the only man of the period who could be compared, even distantly, with himself as a leader, the finest army which the Republic possessed, and took for himself the small corps which was to operate in Italy. And when Moreau refused to adopt the plan which he, Napoleon, eventually used at Ulm, he did not insist, he left him free to choose. He leapt with joy, says Bourrienne, at the news of the success. People pretend that he made Moreau stop at the gates of Vienna. That is untrue. Moreau stopped of his own accord. The same thing was said as regards Campo-Formio, when Napoleon was much closer to Vienna than the generals of the Rhine army—who, moreover, were beaten. Implacability, analysis, distortion, allegations, insinuations—there were all these. To bring him down to an ordinary level, people resorted to detraction and belittlement. It is very remarkable that our habits of mind condemn us to expect creators to have all the negative virtues. We want an eagle to fly without wings, an axe to cut without an edge, a poet to compose without imagination.

III

The Obverse Side

I

MEN'S future characters are apparent in their childhood if only one is prepared to judge them by the passion which betrays itself in their faces rather than by their docile behaviour on their benches at school. With Napoleon there was his fierce pride and there were those signs of superiority which already distinguished him as a boy; in any game he took first place, he assumed the rôle of leader, even though his clothes were torn and his mouth bleeding; or, again, he would remain in solitude and silence in the midst of laughter and noise. He might be beaten until he bled, but he would never cry out or weep. He might be innocent, but he would never declare himself to be so. He was bullied and cuffed, but he kept his teeth clenched. "He seldom had cause to be pleased with his comrades," says Bourrienne, "but he disdained to make complaints against them; and when it was his turn to supervise some duty or other, and the duty was neglected, he preferred confinement to denouncing the little culprits." Later on, when he had come to the throne, he forgot all this. A man had only to have been his master or a fellow-pupil of his and he was overwhelmed with kindnesses.

He did what few men do: he got into touch with and protected those who had seen him when he was wretched. For he had been wretched. He had been hungry. He had known what it was to have one meal a day—and for that one meal nothing but dry bread. He had worn threadbare clothes, green at the knees and elbows, and boots with pasteboard soles. Never once did he complain. If anyone offered him money, he grew very red in the face and walked away. He brought up his brother Louis on his own pay—sixty francs a month. He cooked and he looked after the household. When he was Emperor an official complained of only receiving a thousand francs a month, and he answered: "*I know all about that, sir. . . . When I had the honour to be a second-lieutenant I used to breakfast on dry bread. But I bolted my door on my poverty.*"

Like all romantic artists—and he was one of the greatest in history, and without doubt the most powerful of all—he was full of "*bourgeois* virtues." And "*bourgeois* virtues" are distinguishable from every other kind of virtue in this—that there is nearly always something of the ridiculous about them: a pompous respect for good manners, a mania for domestic orderliness, slippers at the corner of the hearth. They attained their climax in the climax of that *bourgeoisism* of which Napoleon was, at least as regards the law, the real founder. They made Balzac maudlin, they gave Hugo swelled head, they corrupted Ingres, caused Michelet to rave, and caused Stendhal himself to stammer and Carlyle to be oracular. They made these strong-willed men seem like caricatures; and one has perforce to console oneself by observing that it was in such a case, for instance, as that of M. Thiers, that they were displayed in all their most abject innocence. In Napoleon they were surprising, and one has to resist the temptation to use them as an excuse for the crimes of which he was accused. For on the contrary it is these very virtues, perhaps, which best explain his so-called crimes to us.

He was full of *bourgeois* virtues. Some people—the poor—praised him for that. Others—richer—blamed him for the same reason. Such a man, it was said, had no right to be a good son, a good brother, a good husband, a good father, a good friend and a good manager of his household. At any rate, family sentiment, and his own family, compromised his spiritual achievements, after having ruined him materially. For, absurd though it was, his relations were jealous of him, they had fits of "conscience," they believed they had military talent, a divine right, a right of primogeniture;[1] they remonstrated with him, they objected to the thrones he flung to them because others suited them better. "*To listen to them one would think that I had consumed our father's heritage.*" He made kings and queens of them, he gorged them with titles and showered fortunes upon them. And they—they robbed him and betrayed him, yet he always forgave them.[2] For in reality he was a tender-hearted man who could control himself and be circumspect, but who had too much in his mind either to control himself or to be circumspect for any length of time. Marmont, his worst enemy, knew that well: "He hid his sensitiveness, and in that he was different from other men, who would fain display theirs, although they have none. No genuine feeling was ever expressed in vain before him or without affecting him keenly." He adored his son, would play with him for hours and allow himself to be teased by him. He loved both his first and his second wife in a very *bourgeois* way, and when he repudiated the first it was a drama of conscience, of tears, of remorse; that profligate woman had exploited his incredible simplicity too long. Josephine's children were his children. "*Nothing,*" he wrote to Eugène, "*can add to the regard I have*

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[1] See Appendix. Note 3.
[2] See Appendix. Note 4.

for you; my heart knows of nothing which is more dear to it than you; this regard is unalterable." And, moreover, of all his relations, this was the only one who, by his faithfulness, uprightness, purity and honour was quite worthy of him. Passively worthy of him at least—for he was not of Napoleon's stamp. He was an honest man—just that. And perhaps it was for that reason that Napoleon loved him, knowing that in him he would find sure support and complete security, someone who would be a relief from those who betrayed him and battened upon him, one of the emotional poles to which his lonely heart could turn when it was weary of beating too violently. The other pole was his sister Pauline, the feminine glory in a world where his was the masculine virtue, who was the genius of love as he was the genius of strength; his sister whom he loved and who adored him, who followed him alone with her mother to Elba and who, if he had not been even more generous-minded than she was, would have followed him to St. Helena; who, after his fall, never ceased to support him with her tenderness and her money; who pledged or sold all her jewels for his needs at a time when ingratitude was spreading amongst all the others—brothers, intimates, friends, retainers—like a leprosy upon which he closed, or wished to close, his eyes.

In this connection there was talk—with no proof, and merely to vilify him—of incest. It was not realized that his very "*bourgeois* virtues" made such a thing extremely improbable, and that he was really a semi-Oriental, imprisoned by his education, his will-power and his democratic faith, in a Western environment. Such a suggestion would not in any way have defiled him if he had been like a wild beast lying in the sun drunk with blood, between a murderous orgy and an erotic one, and licking his claws with his tongue; a wild beast who crushed the skulls of men and the flesh of women, not in order simply to understand himself in his poignant complexity, but in an attempt to avail himself of the abrupt and fleeting impulses of his neurosis in their horrible but august simplicity. That would have completed him, would have made another picture of him, more definite perhaps, simpler, and therefore less enigmatic for those of us on this side of the oceans who are unable to realize that a man cannot be wholly good or wholly bad. There was no oasis for the dreamer burning with fever, no fruit for him who was thirsty, no woman's tenderness for him who begged for the love of all men whilst forcing his own upon them. That beautiful and splendid lover loved the great man as a sister loves a brother; and it is, perhaps, an involuntary homage to the isolation of heroes that the mean-spirited, instead of admitting the fact, should put forward the explanation that has been mentioned above.

Behold him, then, going from concession to concession, from weakness to weakness, from mistake to mistake; and all because of his superstition as regards his own clan; because of his respect for a niggardly old woman jabbering in her incredible patois—his old-fashioned mother with her invincible resolution, who at one time, like an Amazon of antiquity, had scoured the thickets with Napoleon in her womb; because of the affection he felt for his brothers, flighty or morose though they were, neither good nor bad, but mischief-making and vain, and for his sour-tempered though sometimes gallant-hearted sisters—one of whom, at least, was beautiful and good; because of a wife who was brainless and insanely affected, and because of another wife who was stupid and sensual: behold him, then, dreaming his gigantic dreams amongst his household or in privacy, as solicitous as a country attorney to obtain advantageous posts and lucrative appointments for his own clan. An eternal contradiction, this, which at once conceals and yet betrays the mystery of the man, making him so great in his imagination and so ordinary in his sentiments. And it is through these sentiments of his that he lost sight of the human aspect of his work, just as he preserved its divine aspect by his pride.

2

Such was the immensity of this pride that it was really a part of the mystic regions of his being, the determining factor in all that was permanent and noble in him—that lofty fatalism of which his will-power was only the means and which recognized, fundamentally, no aim in life except that of impressing on events and on men's passions and souls the marks of so profound a transition that the whole of humanity recognized in it an episode vital to its own immortality. He was exalted, as an epoch is exalted—as his own, of which he was the inner motive, was exalted ; and his motive was determined by that vague imperious instinct which, for him, was simply a marvellous historical destiny, impossible to avoid, impossible to curb. But, granted this pride of his, even if he had not felt himself intended for the highest rank, he would still, even if he had been living in the middle of a desert, have endeavoured to prove himself the only man of whom it could be said that such was his destiny. He insisted that every one should admit that—and by their deeds, not by their words only. To his deeds every will had to bow.[1] At his words, every eye had to be lowered. And as to insults—they seemed to him a misunderstanding of his rôle, treason to the common fate of all.

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[1] See Appendix. Note 5.

They did more than wound him, they astonished him: "*I am a man who may perhaps be killed but who must not be outraged.*"

Such a sentiment requires simplicity as its travelling companion, for it is evident that no outward signs, even those of sovereign power, are capable of gratifying it. "At the back of his mind," says Bourrienne, "Bonaparte was always equally contemptuous of the Consulate's tawdriness and of the Empire's flashy display." Of that there are a thousand proofs, from the fierce concentration of his unhappy youth to the dazzling climax of his career and the moral and physical tortures of his exile. Vanity loves a noise, pride prefers silence. Speaking of the vanity of the French people, he once said: "*When will we be able to exchange this for a little pride?*" Indeed, he fled from the crowd, with its ovations and its public exhibitions—a fact which became more noticeable and more inconvenient as curiosity regarding him rapidly increased and as his genius withdrew more and more into isolation when the delirium and misery of the peoples were stirred up on every side of him. "*I shall arrive in Paris unexpectedly,*" he wrote after Marengo. "*I do not intend to have a triumphal arch or any kind of ceremony. I have too good an opinion of myself to care much for such trumpery.*" As a fact, he always arrived there at night or by an entrance at which he was not expected, or several hours early, thus baffling even the most eager sightseers. When he was unable to avoid a fête, when he had to resign himself to it as to a tool which he must use—as one uses a chisel to carve stone or a plough to till the soil—he was in torture. For to him it was so obvious a display of the baseness, the stupidity, the servility and the vulgarity of men that he was afraid, in coming into contact with them, of showing the contempt in which he held them and thus of compromising his power of dominating them from above. He was never the first to enter a conquered capital; he even avoided such places altogether, with a sort of calculated intent in which the satisfaction of his aristocratic stoicism was blended with the mystery with which he wished to be surrounded. He did not enter Madrid. In a peremptory note he ordered Joseph to make a ceremonial entry into Burgos. "*Just as I think that there should be very little ceremony where I am concerned, so I think that you should have plenty of it. In my opinion ceremony is ill-suited to the profession of arms. Besides, I do not want it.*" He raced from one end of Europe to the other, as though in isolation amongst his armies—and in order to uphold their morale, he showed himself to them when he thought fit; but he only staged a solemn function and summoned emperors and vassal kings to it on occasions, such as at Dresden and at Erfurt, when he judged it necessary for the ends he was pursuing—ends which he did not see but whose course he knew—and necessary for its magical effect upon men's imagination. "*What is there in the title 'Emperor'? It is a word like any other. If I have no other title but that when I appear before posterity, I shall be received with laughter.*"[1] He knew, as well as the narrow-minded puritans who reproached him and who never wanted to understand, that that title and the outward power that went with it were part of the instrumental grouping of an orchestra, indispensable to the mighty symphony which he was conceiving and composing in a state of unceasing lyrical intoxication.

This can best be realized at the moment of his fall. When all were one by one abandoning him, those whom he had gorged, those whom he had created—his own family among the first—when in his struggle against the world there were left on his side only a few old peasants and a few conscripts, then it was that his pride caused him to reject the conditions which the Allies (who, though they were at the gates of Paris, were frightened of their own victory) offered him: France, Belgium as far as the Rhine, Italy. . . . Mad? Perhaps. But what strength of mind! "Against the whole universe"—so he might have said—"I have on my side no one but myself, myself alone, and the passion that is in my heart. Behold me! Even if I am brought down, even if I am killed, I shall have maintained the empire which I carry within me. Even for the sake of a double crown and consolidated power, and peace and rest, and colossal riches and the blessings of all men, I shall not have given up a single ray of the star which I have dimly seen. I am he who turns one side of the scales when all the kings and all the peoples, my own included—yes, and God Himself—are throwing themselves into the other. . . ." Two years later, when with all Europe in arms behind him he was driving forward into the Russian Steppes towards that final destiny to the discovery of which, with his pitiless disregard of self, he felt irresistibly drawn, someone asked him who would defend France if she were attacked in his absence. "*My fame,*" he said.

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[1] See Appendix. Note 6.

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Pride, which is, it seems to me, the highest virtue of all, regulates its creative force according to the quality of the ambition which it conditions. But here, again, our meaning must be made clear. One form of ambition is to make a show. The other is to *be.* There are no graduations—or scarcely any—between these two forms of ambition. The former is to the latter what vanity is to pride. For the former kind a new word should be coined, for it is to this kind, unfortunately, that the term in question is most usually applied. But virtue, let it be said, lies only in the latter.

One fact never ceases to cause me astonishment—that is, the absence of ambition amongst the majority of those who are regarded as ambitious because from their college days they keep to their intention of becoming ministers, prefects, ambassadors, academicians, or President of the Republic. To have officials under one's orders for six months, or seven years, within the restricted limits of regulations which one has not even made oneself! Can you imagine, in similar circumstances, a poet who would agree to write his poem for the edification of an assembly of electors and on condition that he did not exceed a certain number of verses and kept to the same metre throughout? Political ambition is the poorest of all—or the highest—according to the case under consideration. But the second case comes to pass only once or twice in ten centuries. A man in power who is not worthy to become absolute master and who does not become so is, from the very fact that Napoleon was worthy of becoming so, a slave. I genuinely believe that Napoleon enjoyed the unique privilege of proving that if a man is in power and he is not Napoleon, then he is nothing.

In power or elsewhere, there is only one ambition worth having, and Napoleon knew it. He defined it—expressly and regally: "*The ambition to dominate men's minds is the strongest of all the passions.*" It was the strongest of his. And only ambitious mediocrities could accuse him of a mediocre ambition—with that of being Emperor, for instance.[1] His ambition was of that kind which condemns a man to remain more or less unnoticed in his youth, because it was not strikingly plain in his speech, in his clothes, in his manner or in his gestures; and only those who knew how to read a face could have discovered it hidden away behind his tightly closed mouth, his light frown and the smouldering fire of his glance. It was apparent to no one, not even to its possessor, because it did not then exist. He was proud, it is true, but just because of that he was nervous; and if he despised the crowded function and the gorgeous uniform, it was because he was afraid that he would be noticed and criticized when the day came for him to wear such a uniform and receive the guests at such a function. Suspicious modesty is an elementary form of pride in a child, and unless the child is very intelligent, all his creative virtues can be crushed by it. But if his growing will-power, or if chance, succeed in making known to him the reasons for his modesty and for the feeling of superiority which is hidden under this pride, then his ambition, of which he is himself unaware, and which people round him, according to their psychological acuteness, call modesty or apathy, will just be waiting for an opportunity to declare itself either in his growing passions or in outside events. To his great surprise, he will one day feel himself to be superior to those who despise him or ignore him, and whose self-confidence, audacity and coolness he but yesterday admired. He will then seek to discover and grasp the means to real power which he will feel welling up in himself.

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[1] See Appendix. Note 7.

Napoleon's ambition was not apparent either in his childhood or in his early youth. The artist was unaware of his own powers; he was introspective and his self-effacement was instinctive. He was thrown back on himself. He already knew what he did not want to be, but he did not yet feel what he wanted to be. Simply because he did not know or even feel what he could be. He did not know himself, and, mark this, he was never to know himself. That is the sign of a great man who, though master of himself as regards his means, is bewildered as regards ends by his lyrical transports and by his own mystery. In all his life he had but one outward and fundamental ambition; and it was the only one necessary for an active manifestation of the greatness which he felt was his. From the day when he first saw fighting and made war;

from the moment when he realized the ineptitude of those who were making it beside him and felt that war was suddenly enhancing, in a sort of lucid intoxication, his faculties of decision, of resolution, of coincidence of conception and action, of which, up till then, he had been unaware—from that moment, what he wanted was a big command. Then, with clenched teeth, he began to intrigue. He undertook thankless tasks which caused him cruel suffering: to be on friendly terms with Barras he curbed his disgust; he fired grapeshot into a crowd of sectionists on the steps of Saint-Roch. To cut off the head of the hydra, Hercules crossed a swamp. François Villon thieved in order to live—that is to say, in order to experience life. Michelangelo consented to humble himself before the Pope in order to obtain a field of activity vast enough for his passion. Goethe bowed and scraped before a princeling so that he did not have to waste time in earning his bread. Jesus always obeyed, to the end that all men should be obedient to Him. At least once in our lives, however great we may be, we must needs submit to servitude in some form or other, if we are to set our own powers free.

Napoleon made the arresting statement: "*I have no ambition at all. . .*" How small-minded is the man who does not realize the astonishing innocence of that! "*I have no* *ambition at all . . . or, if I have, it is so natural to me, it is so innate, it is so essentially a part of my life, that it is like the blood that flows in my veins, it is like the air that I breathe ; it does not differentiate itself from other natural motives of mine, nor does it compel me to move more quickly than they would have me go ; I never have to fight for it or against it, it is never more hurried than I am ; it simply moves along with circumstances and with my ideas as a whole."* That ought to satisfy those people whose first interest is not to discover in history and in life a few autonomous beings and to assign to them the only qualities which are worth considering as noble, but who prefer to attempt to fit every human being by force into a rigid framework, itself designed, it should be noticed, in a vague and distant past by some autonomous being who made his own laws. There comes a time, once in every ten or twenty centuries, when the study of great personalities, involving an examination of their most secret activities, is more useful for society as a whole in the formation of individuals upon whom falls the task of preparing men's minds for a new form of active obedience, than is a passive obedience to the limited precepts of a personality almost entirely engulfed in oblivion and legend. We do not know what Moses was like, and yet, more or less, willingly or otherwise, we persist in obeying him. If we did not know who Napoleon was, and if there remained to us only ten precepts—as this, for instance: "*Interest is only the key to vulgar actions*"—would anyone then dare to assert that we could not find in those precepts the elements of a new aristocracy capable of saving mankind from the lowest forms of democracy under which it has been buried by the laws of Moses for thirty-five centuries? The latter was perhaps only a hard and unscrupulous slave-merchant. No one knows. The autonomous being is a nucleus round which the world ripens. What we are pleased to call his virtues and his defects, but what are in reality only different facets of the same hard diamond, are borne along, in irresistible unity, by his strength of character.

"*No doubt my character is a very peculiar one. But a man would not be in any way extraordinary if he were not of an unusual stamp. I am a particle of rock launched into space. You will find it difficult to believe me, perhaps, but I in no way regret my grandeurs.*" I for my part believe him. I believe that when he was sent to his prison he regretted one thing only: the means to pursue and to attain the vision which was haunting him. Rubens, I am sure, would have left his palaces and his embassies without regret if he had been given the choice between them and his paint-brushes. Napoleon's brush was the means to handle passions and armies and peoples—that is to say, it was *some* sort of sovereign power of which "his grandeurs" were only an outward sign which was made to please others but which he inwardly despised. Everything appertaining to it was for him so much sumptuous drudgery; and he took good care, moreover, to show by his manner, his dress, his words and his expression, the distance that separated a king by divine right from a free man who had crowned himself by his own deeds. "*The actual throne is only a few bits of wood covered with velvet. But the real throne is a man, and that man is myself, with my will-power, my character, my fame.*" The pittance of princes sickened him. He had only disgust—a disgust openly proclaimed—for the base flattery which flowed like liquid mud at his feet. To listen to him one would have said that the more deeply he was engaged the more he felt himself alone, and that he behaved in such a way as to enhance his solitude and so to enjoy it the more. The Austrian marriage was a grandiose experiment, a dance in the desert, the triumphal and disillusioned game of a colossus. He wanted to know to what height his strength could take him, to what depth the fears, the cowardice and the servility of kings would bring them. He wanted to foster himself upon the inward spectacle of a power of which only the extreme limits were unknown to him. He had a poet's contempt for all those who thought that he was pursuing a definite aim, and who at each stage of his career drew breath, in the belief that he had achieved that aim—a throne, for instance, or the possession of some new province. They saw that he had attained the height of their own feeble ambitions, and that was enough for their feeble minds. Every one judged him thus—his enemies and his friends alike—as a man whom one crown could tempt, and whom ten crowns would satisfy. To be the master of France, of Europe, of the world—but what was that for this pilgrim towards the Absolute who felt that he would never master the mystery which dwelt within him?

What is it, after all, I ask you, what is it to make a show in one's own epoch? To *be*, for the future, for eternity—that was what he sought. "*Immortality is a* SOUVENIR *left in the memory of mankind. That is an idea leading to great things. Better never to have lived at all than to leave no traces of one's existence.*"[1] He had that thirst for eternity which goes with great natures. He wanted time much more than space to be his. Space is so small. A man with a great mind ignores space. He is the contemporary of all men who have ever lived and of all men who will live hereafter. He well knows that he has caused men's hearts to beat, and that he will cause them to beat again. If his sense of solitude increases as he approaches the term of his life on earth, it is because, in his eternal life, he is in closer communion with all those who have ceased to exist or with those whose existence has not yet begun, and because he conceives himself as a member of an ideal cohort wherein, some day, his rights will be recognized. The power of illusion! He can believe that, even though he knows that at the moment of his death, his consciousness will pass into endless night. He will know nothing of his glory. But he knows that it will be there. He wills it to exist. He loves and fights, he makes himself hated and makes himself loved, in order to enhance it. In whatever way the spirit of man is to develop, he will be a part of that spirit.

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[1] See Appendix, Note 8.

For a being of this stamp, suffering is only a means; and death—another means. "*What man would not let himself be stabbed on the condition that he had been Cæsar?*" Illusion, illusion! How pathetic is your great mind—you who knew that "men *were rare*," who thought you understood them, and yet who understood them so little. More rare, indeed, than you thought. Are there two or three men in a century who would accept martyrdom on condition that after their death they would remain alive in the common memory of mankind? Not one, perhaps. Napoleon accepted martyrdom because he was such a man as that.[1] After his fall, what caused him most suffering was the thought that he would not occupy a place in the memory of the nations comparable with that of Alexander or of Cæsar. For the poet, what has already been accomplished is as nothing. What is still to be accomplished—it is that alone which counts. He was forty-five, an age at which, in noble characters, the essential elements of a man's nature rearrange themselves on a more orderly and more logical basis; on one that is better balanced and more definite. Much careful fostering had in course of time strengthened those elements; they were ready now to soar towards conquests unknown to his youthful spirit, which had grown as the interval separating them from the end of life had lessened. And he was a prisoner; he could not fulfil his dream—that dream which was always widening its scope! He was told that he was dying of weakness. "*No,*" he cried. "*It is not weakness, it is my strength which is stifling me; it is life which is killing me.*" He would never be what he could have been, and he was dying because of that. But beware of pitying him. Do not pretend to hold his view and imagine that a man such as he could be compared with any other, living, dead, or not yet born. "*Glory?*" he said. "*I have gorged myself with it. I have thrown*

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[1] See Appendix. Note 9.

it away like dirt. And in passing I may say that I have made it something which henceforth will be very ordinary and at the same time very difficult to achieve."

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All that there is to say has been said of the exceptional powers which gave him, over most men, those immediate advantages without which great talents are sometimes condemned to beat the empty air or are turned aside from the field of action to the discovery and the development of subjective worlds. His ability to bear fatigue, insomnia, and privation, his enormous capacity for work, his almost inhuman memory, his precarious health—lashed with nerves of fire—the zeal which he inspired, either willingly or by force, in his overworked *entourage*, the way he wore out his officers, his secretaries, even his horses, his habit of snatching ten minutes' sleep on a chair at will and at any time of day, and of being as firm, as resolute, as lucid afterwards as before: all this has been noted. Praise has been given to the brevity and the distinctness of his questions, to the clearness of his orders, to his unfailing power instantly to transform his impressions into actions.[1] Comments have been made upon his meticulous personal cleanliness—foolish comments, in my opinion, because of the apparent sugges-

[1] See Appendix. Note 10.

tion that it was due to some Oriental refinement, some abnormal neurosis. But I would rather regard this as characteristic of the man who requires space—the man who sleeps upon the ground, sees the stars every night, and follows the winds in their course, of the man who would die of grief if he could not have the natural elements as his companions. "*Water, air, and cleanliness,*" he once said, "*are the chief items in my pharmacopœia.*" I can well believe it. For therein lies the surest means of achieving the fine equipoise of the hero. A saint would have no need for that.

But less has been said, because it is less easy to describe and because here again the poison of morality intervenes to falsify men's judgment, of his mastery over himself. He was at the centre of a vast web, every thread of which converged to meet in his brain. He might not have known whither his destiny was leading him, but he always knew what road he had to follow to seek it. Truly enough he was composed of contradictions—like passion itself. His own passion followed a route marked by jolts and shocks, but continuous and driving its way straight forward with no regard to incidents or accidents or chance episodes on either side of it. Since he had an heroic spirit, the ruses and dissimulation of the Italian side of him were no more than powerful weapons in the service of a higher passion—disinterested and fatal like love—a passion to which he sacrificed everything else in his being and towards which he was compelled to move. A man such as he has no moral consciousness perhaps, but neither does he know the meaning of hypocrisy. He concentrated his energies—oiled their springs, as it were—so that at the selected moment he could act, silently, and according to his own nature. For him there was no question of mutilating his inner self, of blushingly suppressing what would be called his passions, but, rather, of forging them in silence, and making of them, in the secret recesses of his heart, a metal unknown to all. For him, to be "master of his passions" meant to possess the exceptional strength of mind to discover which was his dominant passion and then, for its sake, to suppress his secondary ones. "*To live,*" he used to say, "*is to suffer, and an honest man is always fighting to remain master of himself.*" [1]

He was not thus master of himself in all circumstances. I have mentioned his fits of temper, those brusque assaults of his tyrannical certainty against anyone who did not share it. Moreover, the remorse which he experienced after these sallies, which exhausted him and in which his physical disability played a large part,[2] touched his pride rather than his conscience. If he did not wish to see Hudson Lowe, it was because he felt an inward humiliation at being unable to keep full control of his nerves in the latter's presence. An assembly worried him, exasperated him, because it deprived him of his method of admitting no criticism and no discussion. He was brusque with women because in reality he was afraid of them. The common people disgusted him, frightened him. Before assemblies, or women, or the mob, he was out of his element. His element was mental solitude, that is to say the supreme power which, given conquest of self, could realize, in the silence that surrounded him and through the grand anonymity of his passions, the solitude of the heights or—its equivalent—that of the army. There, in very truth, his nerves were his own. He would not employ a man who had done him an ill turn, but he who served him was sure of being given a place, even a man who neither liked him nor was liked by him. "*The man who is truly a man does not hate at all . . . his anger and his ill-humour never last more than a minute. He does not consider persons. He considers only things—their importance and their consequences.*" "He was not the man," says Bourrienne, "to sacrifice the exigencies of his policy to his personal resentment." He took the man he needed, wherever that man happened to be—even if he was in the enemy's ranks. He made use in turn of men who hated him—Gouvion Saint-Cyr, Lecourbe, Macdonald, and amongst his lieutenants these obviously were the men whom he respected most. His generous welcome awaited Carnot. He summoned Benjamin Constant, who had insulted him the day before, and without reproaching him, set him at his side to work out his own ideas. As Consul he received a letter from Kléber addressed to the *Directoire* and full of accusations against him—essentially false accusations, moreover—and yet he issued to the army of Egypt a proclamation containing this sentence : "*Have the same unlimited trust in Kléber which you have in me : he deserves it.*" What strong revulsion of feeling he must have overcome in order to write those simple words !

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[1] See Appendix. Note II.

[2] Bourrienne.

"Fortune," said Machiavelli, "can do nothing against great men. Though her fickleness raise them up or cast them down, she can alter neither their plans nor their resolution ; for these are so dependent upon character that they are out of reach of her blows." And, in actual fact, where Napoleon was concerned, no personal incidents turned him from his path. He derived from them, on the contrary, the strength to go further, because in order to overcome them he exercised his keenest talents. No obstacle rebuffed him. No check discouraged him. No catastrophe prostrated him. It was when every one became infatuated that he was recognized as a leader and was followed as such. And where he went all men went, because he made the gesture which was exactly appropriate to the moment. He would make his gesture eagerly, for it gave him an especial kind of delight,[1] even if he destroyed his own peace. Even if he pledged his fortune. Even if he staked his life. At Arcole, he leapt on to a bridge which was under a hail of bullets simply because, if he had not done so, he would not have won the victory which it was necessary for him to win. In the Egyptian desert he refused to drink until after the last soldier. At Jaffa, he went amongst men suffering from the plague, because moral depression was afflicting his army. He crossed the Guadarrama on foot with his infantry and in a blizzard. At Brienne he rode his horse at a bursting bomb, because he had just noticed that his conscripts were hesitating. "*Courage comes from thought. Bravery is often only impatience at danger.*"

Sin does not begin with fear, harshness, hatred or anger, but with the quality of the deed which fear or harshness or hatred or anger leads us into committing. It is the act of the impulsive man incapable of seeing in his passions a vision which, by raising them above the vulgar appetites and their immediate satisfaction, builds up in him the monument of his whole personality whose defects, whose vices even, help to foster its harmonious development. Indulgence made Napoleon make more mistakes—commit more crimes, perhaps—than did serenity. But apart from those *bourgeois* and family sentiments the steadfastness of which every one—whether in blame or in apology—observes, none of the banal temptations, even those of the flesh, over which so many energies stumble, took hold of his mind. "*The strong man is he who can intercept at will the communications between his senses and his thoughts.*" Neither women, nor flatterers, nor power, nor popularity, nor rancour, could turn him from his goal.

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[1] See Appendix. Note 12.

IV

The Metal

I

IT is in reality our more vulgar interests which prevent nearly all of us from according to the man of action the impartial judgment which some of us occasionally accord to the poet. Most of us only see the poet when he is holding the conductor's baton, as it were, and when the weaknesses and the unhappiness which he shares in common with ourselves are effaced by his sudden gesture. And so in heightened enthusiasm and in a prescribed flow of ideas there results a sort of lucid delirium which, with prodigious certainty, retains everything which must not be given up, glosses over everything which must not be emphasized, abandons to triumphant expression only the heights of rhythm, only the grand contours of form, only the appealing accents of colour and movement. Why should we not give the same magnanimous credit to the man of action? The task of the man of action is infinitely dramatic. Consider it. The furrow is opened up and the far end of the field is in sight. But his ploughshare strikes against some hard substance and is broken or turned aside or even falls through into some hidden bog which engulfs it. Matter is less pressed for time than is his own imagination. For his art is not concerned with the inert and passive mass of sounds, forms, colours, or even words, but with the contradictory and cruelly impulsive and complex world of feelings and passions. His material is Man. And in Man he encounters an active resistance which is unknown to the painter, the sculptor or the musician, who have only to contend with that coming from within. Following each act of his comes an accusation of injustice, of arbitrariness, of immorality or of tyranny. The poet, during his lifetime, at all events, can work alone without anyone objecting, but the man of action can only achieve creative autonomy by enforcing upon those whom he has drawn within his orbit, or subjugated by his will-power, an obedience which either blinds them or revolts them. If the man of action compromises, he weakens himself by the very act of so doing. If he does not compromise, he is a monster. He lives the ceaseless drama of his responsibility.

Napoleon knew that. And he accepted the fact: even up to the end, even though the end came as it did. For if he made a mistake he admitted it. If anyone, referring to his mistakes—that of Russia, for example—mentioned the promptings of his ministers or the errors of his lieutenants, he would answer: "*I am the master; the whole blame falls upon me.*" Thus he plainly reserved to himself the right to judge them. He withheld from them any right to exempt themselves from his orders; and for the most part they had no inclination to do so. "*When I give an order I am obeyed, because the responsibility is mine.*" His responsibility, as he well knew, was heavy, but he possessed and displayed in his actions such splendour, both of conception and of execution, that he found the minds of all men being drawn more and more rapidly within his orbit. It was in every man's interest to obey him,[1] not only because he was just and gave rewards, not only because of the material benefits that could be obtained by so doing (for over all men's heads he held the most terrible of risks); but because of the moral benefits which were assured to each man by the liberation of unsuspected energies which a will-power infinitely stronger than his own revealed to him by discerning in him and by quickening into action the germs of qualities which were already his and which set him in his rightful place. "*I cool hot heads and I warm cold ones.*" He had the gift, sometimes by bullying them, often by caressing them, but in any case by observing them, of revealing to people the possibility of attaining an equilibrium of which the elements were already in their possession. "*Men are what one wishes them to be.*" He released them, in fact.

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[1] See Appendix. Note 13.

He released. In that, above all, lies the secret of his power. He released people from criticism. He released them from having to choose. In a word, from decision. Was he thus preparing men to fail him in the days of his misfortune, when none of them, in his absence, was capable of daring anything? But every great deed merely displaces forces which are useless everywhere except where the deed itself takes effect. Perhaps, again, outside the common herd, he debased men's characters in his lifetime—although the task of the revolutionary axe had been to remove the highest. But within the common herd he forged characters and uplifted them. Perhaps, in a word, he created slaves? But that is a condition of every kind of greatness—whether one thinks of Cæsar, or of Jesus, or of Michelangelo—and whatever may have been the empire over which power was wielded.

2

When pride, ambition, and self-mastery are welded thus with one another and provide a man's natural gifts with a framework of iron and gold which gives them the power to impress their stamp upon the universe, a remarkable phenomenon is produced in him. A normal one, however, and as irresistible as the tide or the night. He has a vague feeling that this destiny is absorbed in the substance of that god of the true mystics who embodies ignorance of aims and yet a monstrous power to pursue those aims past the successive visions which place themselves between his ends and himself and which then evade him before he has succeeded in grasping them. "*I feel myself pushed towards an unknown goal. When I have reached it, an atom will be enough to overwhelm me.*" Such fatalism was in no way systematic. It was induced by no belief, no doctrine, no superstition. It resulted from an instinctive obedience to his own impulses: it was their power which determined his pride, their constant direction which governed his ambition, and it was they which made him master of himself in order that he might discern them. His genius functioned through him; he was the instrument of his joys, but the instrument at the same time of his sufferings, for though he had the power to direct his talents and his actions for the benefit of this fatalism of his, he had not that of resisting the obscure orders which he received from it and which led him, through crowds of human beings and in solitude of spirit, along blood-stained roads. "*All my life I have sacrificed everything—tranquillity—*INTEREST, HAPPINESS—*to my destiny.*"

How can one fail to recognize in such an attitude and in such a phrase the sound of the heroism of antiquity? It is a reaffirmation of the great Mediterranean spirit, untrammelled by negative morality or by interested hypocrisy. It is virtue according to Plutarch, the man who set a style to his life; the man who followed his own path—a path more cruel for himself than for others—in order to lead both himself and others towards a type of humanity which Fate was to dominate, but which, through a sublime revenge, was to seek in the traps, the catastrophes and the sorrows of Fate, a spiritual nourishment capable of enlarging and tempering that virtue. It is not only the virtue of the strong man. It is that of the wise man too. It is, in fine, that of the poet: and the poet is at that point of lyrical equipoise where the wise man and the strong man combine harmony of intellect and intoxication of feeling in a single form. "*We must be greater* IN SPITE OF OURSELVES," wrote Napoleon to Alexander, with the incredible innocence of the poet who, in spite of giggles and rebuffs, in spite, even, of a too hurried and friendly support, is always trapped by the illusion that to be understood he has only to act, or even only to make a show. "*We must be greater in spite of ourselves. It is wise and politic to do what Fate decrees and to go whither the irresistible march of events leads us.*"

Far from annihilating free-will, such fatalism determines it and exalts it. Free-will is one of its functions. Such a man makes a constant effort to maintain himself at the height of events, whatever they may be, well knowing that he can rely upon all events. By a grandiose subversion of the meaning of the words, he who was a prey to that energy which was always exposed to risk and drama and conquests, arrived at the point of denying free-will. "*The greater one is,*" wrote Napoleon, "*the less free-will one should have; one depends upon events and circumstances. I declare myself the most enslaved of men. My master has no pity: and by my master I mean the nature of things.*" The irony of his candour! The ingenuous laughter of the most accomplished freak of free-will in all history, who for his whim forced history to follow precipitately in the wake of a career which led mankind pell-mell towards common horizons! Here the mysticism of the heroic is resolved into definite components. The poet is the prisoner of his real task on earth, the servant of his visions, the victim of his grandeur. He throws his own consciousness and that of men back into oblivion. He confuses the fate of men with his own fate. And for the first time, doubtless, since the vagabond of Galilee, he is right.

Napoleon was right. He has been reproached with egoism, but his egoism was that of those men who belong least to themselves. I have mentioned Jesus. But there is Gautama too. And all the great seekers of visions—Shakespeare or Rembrandt, Rubens or Beethoven, Goethe or Hugo. And all the great leaders in ideas—Isaiah or Saint Paul, Luther or Loyola, Pascal or Nietzsche. Who can count the victims of Phidias or of Michelangelo or of Corneille? After three or four centuries, or after twenty-five, the followers of this man or that are prepared to die at a barricade or on a battlefield; they are prepared to mutilate their thoughts or put out their own eyes or break their own ear-drums. To be more like Napoleon, men would have stopped the beating of their hearts. Even in his lifetime he went on his way alone, distressed, in truth, to see his wife, his children and his brothers out of their element; miserable because, hypnotized as he was by that noble but indistinct vision which was for ever in front of him, he did not spend enough time in loving them and taking care of them; but always moving on with his ears stopped against their cries. You think, perhaps, that he was unconscious of all that? How little you know of him, then! He pitied them far more than he pitied himself, for from the bosom of that so-called egoism, which was really only immense illusionism, he drew consolation. "*I am less unhappy,*" he said at St. Helena, "*than those who are harnessed to my destiny.*" But was it not necessary that they should so be? The cross of great men in torture weighs heavily on the shoulders of all of us. Dostoievsky's children would not have been hungry if their father had agreed to be a chamberlain to the Czar. And if Jesus had recognized his mother, perhaps some millions of men would have escaped torture. And Dante would not have abandoned his family on the ruins of his home if he had opened the gates of Florence to the Ghibellines—or to the Guelphs, it makes no difference. And Jean-Jacques, if he had not betrayed a woman's secret, abandoned his bastards and slandered his friends, would not have written the *Confessions*. . . . The son of the great Lamarck had only one thing to say about his father—that he had managed his estate badly!

"*I am an extreme egoist.*" You will leave all your relations, your friends—to follow me. For the capture of the phantom which I am pursuing is of so much importance to mankind, it is of such vast dimensions that if I have all men on my side to help me grasp it, I shall not have too many. I cannot bear there to be any obstacle whatever between me and this phantom, or that you should not see the obstacle as I see it and employ all your talents for me in breaking it down. It is not I who am cruel. It is this phantom. You grumble? You grumble! And you demand rest! And I! And I? Do you think, then, that I am not suffering? You ask yourselves where my wounds are? It is the light shining from my eyes which prevents your seeing them. "*Do you not see what is happening here, Caulaincourt? The men whom I have satisfied want to enjoy themselves. They do not want to fight any more. They do not realize, poor logicians that they are, that they must still go on fighting to win the repose which they desire so much. And what of myself? Have I not a palace too—and a wife, a child? Am I not wearing out my physique with every kind of fatigue? Do I not throw my life daily into the holocaust for the sake of our country? Ungrateful people! . . . It is only my poor soldiers who set about it in good earnest. It is a terrible thing to say, but it is the truth. Do you know what I ought to do? Send away all these noble lords of yesterday to sleep in their feather beds and to strut about in their castles and begin the war again with the help of pure and courageous youth.*"

3

He was the youngest of them all. And the purest. Moreover, he was defenceless except for the deeds which were necessary to attain his phantom. Of what value to him—to him in whose heart were the enchanted palaces of an imaginary world—were all these castles, these bags of money, these gold-embroidered clothes? He once said, I am not sure when, that a *louis* a day would have been enough for his personal needs. Yet he was lavish. Any man who chose might draw upon him. He paid every one's debts—those of his relations, of his soldiers, of unknown persons who wrote to him. He subsidized industry and commerce with his own money, and he fixed the cost of construction of bridges, roads and canals. He endowed and filled the museums. He possessed nothing which did not at the same time belong to others. He was completely contemptuous of, or, rather, indifferent to, material wealth. The pomp which he displayed was only one of the methods of his system. "*My estate is comprised of glory.*"

That much can be seen from his childhood onwards. He experienced the widespread generosity, the fanatical friendships common in young people who, before they have glimpsed the vast expanse of their own imagination, make themselves appear ridiculous by passing directly, with no transition stage, from a convulsive silence in the face of mockery and brutality to an ill-balanced enthusiasm—whenever they can find a heart or a mind to listen to them—for all the chimeras that cross their path. He read Jean-Jacques, he read Ossian, he even read Bernardin de Saint-Pierre. He devoured the writings of the philosophers and sought to imitate them. He wanted to avenge his native Corsica. But when the Revolution broke out, he welcomed it eagerly, even to the point of getting himself and all his family driven out of

Corsica for the sake of it. He always had two aspects, apparently contradictory, but depending in reality on the person to whom he was speaking. He was reserved with fools and expansive with enthusiasts, confidently so, moreover, and without testing the solidity of the foundations of their zeal. He would confide his great projects to the charming but fickle Alexander, who was so ready to become a knave if circumstances warranted it. He would call him his friend, would embrace him and walk arm-in-arm with him for hours. To Desaix, or Fox, or Roederer, or Goethe, he would unbosom himself without reserve; or to any unimportant visitor who showed some attention or some intelligence or some spirit. But it would be his own chimera which he would describe to them. He would believe from the start in the fidelity, the imagination, the generosity of others, because he judged them all by his own standard.[1] When he gave himself up to England he did not doubt that she would welcome him as he had welcomed a great Englishman who had come to him to ask for salt and bread and water and shelter.

I have spoken of forgiving. I have spoken of forgetting. This goes far beyond forgiveness, beyond forgetting even. The judgment of the future, as a whole, intervenes to sum men up; and the judgment is that he was a fatalist who knew better than anyone the action of events on the human mind, an egoist of a superior kind who knew the secret of motives, a man of supernatural will-power unable to bear malice against others who had not dared to face the ills which he had suffered in order to develop and cultivate a will-power comparable with his own. " In the complicated circumstances of his fall," wrote Las Cases, " he saw things so much in the mass and from so high a standpoint, that men, as such, escaped his notice. Never was he to be surprised into expressing resentment towards any of the persons against whom one would have thought that he had most grounds of complaint. To remain silent about them when their names were mentioned in his presence . . . was the furthest that he would go in indicating his censure." Sometimes he would even defend them, because, having lived so strenuously himself without having stumbled, he knew why others did so. They were not evil. They lived according to their natures. And Fate weighed upon them as upon himself. " *You do not know men ; they are difficult to understand when one wants to be just. Do they know themselves, can they explain themselves ? Most of those who abandoned me would never have suspected their own defection, perhaps, if I had continued to be fortunate. Circumstances have both their virtues and their vices. Our final ordeals are above all*

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[1] See Appendix. Note 14.

human forces! And then I was abandoned rather than betrayed; there was more weakness round me than treachery; it was a Saint Peter's denial, with repentance and tears close at hand. And besides, who, in all history, had more partisans and friends than I had? Who was more popular or more loved? . . . No, human nature could have shown itself in an uglier light than that, and I might have had more cause for complaint!" Here already are the first intimations of romantic pessimism followed by the stoic acceptance of the man who knew how to conquer it by abandoning himself to action.

4

This pessimism, it seems to me, sets a condition on liberty. I do not think that Napoleon ever indicated an ideal aim to reach, an aim demanding belief in one of the entities—justice, liberty, happiness—with which it is so easy to stir the multitudes. He consistently addressed himself to their latent energy, which he developed by the most virile means, to their sense of honour, which he invoked, to their spirit of emulation, which he exalted. The social optimism of popular leaders, on the other hand, the optimism which holds before the people a metaphysical or social idol for them to capture, demands an immediate abdication of their own liberty. In order to make others believe, they, the leaders, must believe in realities situated outside themselves and accessible to all, not by means of personal risk and personal effort, but by constant submission to a certain number of commands, to transgress which is represented as a crime. They are often generous-minded, but though they lead the herd, they are in the herd themselves. Between Napoleon and Saint Paul, for example, there is the abyss which separates the master from the slave, and neither of them had the power to cross that abyss.

" There was only one man whom I ever respected," Stendhal used to say, " and that was Napoleon." That is to say, he had never met another man who knew how to make himself respected. But, it should be noted, by fear or by affection, employed together or alternatively. Affection was conquered, fear was conquered. There was no question in this of the material means which tyranny has at its disposal, but of the moral means which are displayed by deeds and which reveal in him who accomplishes them a pitiless resolution to go right on to the end of his resources, even though, to attain his goal, he may have to kill and be killed. Amongst us, Napoleon was the last of the ancients and one of the few free men whom the world has ever known.

There are only two ways of being a free man : to let no man be your master in the realm of ideas, or to be the master of all men in the realm of action. It should be carefully noted that these two ways imply—the one as much as the other—a difficult conquest; and that, on a final analysis, both of them include a complete domination over self, in view of a gigantic harmony which is to be imposed, some day or other, either during one's life or after one's death, or perhaps for ever, except in one's own solitary pride, upon the spiritual inheritance of the universe. That is my view. This domination of self forms, through those who are subjected to it, generations of slaves, but it also sets on the heroic path those few minds who are worthy of aiming at liberty. I spoke of release. It is in no way the same thing as liberation. To release from responsibility is to subjugate to a will which is not your own. To liberate, on the contrary, is to subjugate to a responsibility which is your own. Jesus, Masaccio, Montaigne, Sebastian Bach, Napoleon—these released poor souls, but they liberated rich ones. And in the act both rich and poor were brought back to their personal virtues. They were forced to see in themselves the spectacle of spiritual forces endeavouring, by enthusiastic introspection, by passionate curiosity, by the taste for risk and by continuous effort, to create their autonomy. So much the worse for him who was choked with too strong meat. "*The super-man is in no one's path.*"

An imagination that has been delivered crowns this liberty, of which fatalism is the foundation;

a powerful imagination which endlessly outstrips the acts of the individual; which is constantly breaking the earlier chains of education, of memory, of habit, of fear; which enables its possessor to capture another height daily and to discover from there other plains to invade; and which, either by its power of expression or by its power of action, allows him to perceive no limits except those of his own talents, of the extent of which, moreover, he is unaware. "*I always lived two years ahead.*" He needed less time when, as a mere boy, in threadbare uniform and suffering from fever and itch, he brought his ragged troops over the high passes of the Piedmontese Alps to deliver "the promised land" to their zeal as mystical crusaders and pillaging poets. He needed less time to lead his Grand Army from the spray of the English Channel to the mud of Poland—via Vienna and Berlin. He needed less time to bring the young civilization of the West face to face with the oldest and most forgotten of the civilizations of the East, at the foot of the Pyramids. That much time might have been necessary, if he had been able to force the whole universe to obey him, to break England's fortune against the continental ramparts. That much time might have been necessary, if he had captured *Saint-Jean d'Acre*, to move from Syria into India. That much time might have been necessary, starting from Madrid and seizing Moscow on the way, to fall upon Constantinople and so take Europe in the rear. It might be said that in Italy, in Egypt, in Palestine, or beyond the Vistula and in the direction of the Mongolian empires, he was endlessly searching for the cradle of the sun. "*Great names are only made in the East.*" He was always marching towards it, and since England barred the ocean mists to him, it was as though he desired to go right round the globe in order to strike her in the back. He appeared: and his very appearance was enough to upset not only all the political, military and moral conceptions of the moment—hollow phraseology, cautious manœuvres, restrictive principles—but also to stave in the bulwarks of time and space, to precipitate the whole of history and the whole globe into whatever place he happened to be in, to gather them into his heart in order to imbue them with his strength and then to make them flow back again. For him time and distance were only the pawns on the chessboard of the planet, pawns that he used in combination with the movements of others represented by his armies, his policy, and the feelings and passions which he roused. "*Imagination,*" he used to say, "*governs the world.*" Evidently, since, from the time of his appearance, the world turned towards him.

Twenty years, the twenty years of his active life—only twenty years of active life and so much to do! During those twenty years, which he gave to the conception of his poem, I see him in a state of lyrical intoxication. I see him going beyond the action of the immediate moment, bounding forward from it, and, just as in a speech one word implies and determines the next, finding in each of his deeds the point of departure for the one which was to follow. I see him working out his mighty symphony as it developed from movement to movement, hurling forth its waves—ever extending, ever more urgent and more sonorous—from his exalted imagination which remained at their centre and drew its strength and its courage directly from their flood. I see him alone with the whole universe whirling in his soul. He hurried forward, bewildered and yet lucid-minded, with his heart beating regularly, in a direction favourable to his breathless epoch, which could scarcely follow him. He was dazzled by his own mirages. He was drunk with his own strength. All life existed in order to obey him. "*I used to see the world flying beneath me as though I were being carried in the air.*"

V

The Matrix

I

A MEDAL always comes from a matrix. A man does not fall from heaven. He is bound, by environment, by education, by his ancestry and his race, to a set of circumstances, events and chances which determine his nature and his occupation. Even if he seems autonomous, as did Napoleon. Especially, in fact, if he seems autonomous. For then, as we have seen, he is the most obedient of mortals. He knows it and he admits it. His power is such that it is incessantly deriving nourishment from all the energies of time and space. The more personal a man is, the less egoistical he is. The more free he is, the less independent he is. The more he is in possession of himself, the less he belongs to himself.

It seems to me that the French, of all nations, misunderstand Napoleon because for the most part they regard him as one of themselves and scarcely ever think of his origins. Both his detractors and those who make apologies for him look for French qualities in him, and as they do not find them they force and falsify the comparison in order to grasp it better. Napoleon was Corsican—above all, Italian;[1] and I have already mentioned the essential characteristic that distinguished him from the very beginning—that concentration of his whole soul round a central passion in favour of which all others were utilized or rejected. His insatiable thirst for glory, which caused his teeth to clench and his face to grow pale because of the contraction of his heart, sprang directly from it. But that was not all. That strange race, the most distinctive in Europe, to which a continuous and hidden desire for domination assures the rigidity and the flexibility of a sword, can be recognized in many other ways.

There is a love for unity in the ordering of the world; for an order which is quite unlike our French conception and which, moreover, we scarcely know except as an ideal expounded in our monuments, our gardens, our tragedies, our music and all our literature, doubtless because our political and social disorder is, on the contrary, more or less continuous; for an order which is no longer merely speculative, as with us, but organic, carved in living matter itself by a cruel disciplining of the most formidable of passions; for an order which is not a resigned attitude of the wisest parts of one's being when confronted with the grossest parts, but a victory of the most nobly passionate parts over the most impulsive ones. There is a wide distance separating the well-bred, highly sceptical intellectual seeking a spiritual harmony which will best isolate him from the general folly surrounding him, from the harrowed being who, bearing drama always within him, strives to stamp his will upon that drama as it is unfolded. The gauge is no longer the same. And, moreover, the term "gauge" is not applicable to the latter. With the former it is the static feeling for harmonious proportions which can register the antagonism of the passions entirely in intellectual terms. With the latter it is a dynamic equilibrium between these passions themselves which in the heart of a powerful man is being overcome at all hours of the day by his need to define his own being. The Italian equilibrium, the French gauge, are at two opposite poles: the latter in intelligence, the former in the mania for life. A gigantic dream demands gigantic methods. We must make up our minds not to consider Michelangelo and Chardin as suitable for comparison, simply because they followed the same profession and because each of them did good work in it. I see no point in multiplying examples. Colbert issued his decrees and his ordinances, but they were things seen from without, as it were, answering to a political, administrative and æsthetic system of unification and clear enough to men's minds. Napoleon established a new society, remodelled organically on the so-called natural rights of man as claimed by the epoch which had nurtured him. He substituted laws for regulations. Turenne's manœuvres conformed to the suggestions of the purest and most correct method. Those of Napoleon drew their most irresistible inspirations from the visions of lines and masses which flashed through his brain like lightning. For pure reason he substituted imagination.

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[1] *"I am Italian or Tuscan, rather than Corsican."*

There is another thing, and that, it seems to me, is vital. He was Italian to the extent that he had no feeling of being ridiculous. Or, if he had it, he mastered it; for the voice of his passion was louder. I am not unaware that one day, when homage was being paid to him, he answered: "*From the sublime to the ridiculous is only a step.*" But that is the point: his movements were so impulsive and so rapid that when he had taken this particular step, he left no trace of it on the ground. He passed through ridicule, quite simply, as a cannon-ball pierces a paste-board decoration, without being affected by it, without anyone noticing the impact; the decoration made no resistance, the cannon-ball crushed the man who laughed at him. Had he been French, he might not have attempted to be Napoleon, for fear of ridicule. Had he been German, he might have tried, but, unable to think quickly enough, ridicule would soon have submerged him. Had he been English, he might perhaps have succeeded, but he would instinctively have masked any possibility of ridicule with a Puritan's collar. The Italian is the only man who is not afraid of ridicule—remember Napoleon's proclamations, his tactics even, with their audacity and their unexpectedness, his title of Emperor, the ceremonies at his consecration, the Imperial nobility, the Austrian marriage—the Italian is the only man because he carries within himself a vehemence in life which prevails over ridicule as a train prevails over the wind. I am again thinking of Michelangelo with his monstrous contortions and his long-bearded God the Father Who floats across the darkness but Whose expression is endlessly made rhythmical by an inconceivable will-power. I am thinking of Tintoretto with his movement which nothing except the tumultuous order imposed by his mighty spirit distinguishes from an acrobatic orgy. I am thinking of Giotto whose groups would merely resemble grimacing comedians but that the pathetic depth of their sentimental life registers the least of their gestures as part of an harmonic whole which is as pleasant as the sweetest of voices. And I cannot prevent myself from thinking that the French, so up in arms against those of their own countrymen who wish to separate themselves from the crowd, so contemptuous of their own real artists, so taken with all the artists who hail from other countries—that the French welcomed Napoleon thanks to the foreign character contrasting so sharply with their customary standards, which they suddenly recognized in him. That much we have already seen, I think.

2

This Italian, who arrived to conquer France and, after France, Europe by means of the French people, which was by then relieved of the incubus of its nobility, was himself a noble. It happens frequently, almost constantly, in history, that it is a deserter from the aristocracy who leads into battle the mob that is eager to free itself. Pericles, for instance. And Cæsar. And Napoleon. Such an aristocrat may or may not share in the passions of the mob ; but he understands them, approves of them and brings to the service of these youthful forces the assistance of a time-honoured culture of will and authority which an education generally superior to that of his subordinates refines still further. Let it not be objected that Napoleon belonged to the petty nobility. To start with, that is not certain. His family ruled in Tuscany or in Æmilia, I do not know which. But these Corsican patrician families, poor, proud and jealous, living under constant menace and in the midst of bitter clan feuds and chronic brigandage, preserved an aptitude for command which was evidently superior to that of the French nobles, who were ready enough to die elegantly but who for two centuries past had been rotting in domesticity. When Napoleon was born the island was in full revolt. Twice his family was hunted out, and twice proscribed : by the French in the first instance, then by the Corsicans. That meant flight into the scrub, then overseas, with his house plundered and burned ; destitution ; a greedy, fierce mother, eight starving brothers and sisters, whose protector he constituted himself at the age of sixteen. Any other man might have succumbed and bowed his head. He remained steadfast. But bitterness and contempt for his caste, which jeered at him and snubbed him, accumulated in a mind which was being worked upon by the ideas of the epoch. Immured in his fierce pride and in his silence, in the midst of terrible events which he followed with avidity, there was evolved—the leader of men.

The leader. Behold him ! I know well enough that, apart from certain signs, the nobility in a man's blood is seldom apparent. But such signs, amongst which, in well-bred people, one may mention a slimness of wrist and ankle, a smallness of hand and foot, are not always recognizable. And, in any case, what of the giants of old in their armour ? Refinement of manners comes from education, above all from the particular quality of a mind ;

facial beauty is a matter of chance ; its accent, majesty, grace, and strength, depend upon the nature of the internal discipline which a man exercises over himself. Such and such a *bourgeois* is distinguished-looking, such and such a noble resembles a lackey. But consider Napoleon. Merely to say that he had the face of a leader is not enough. He had the face of the founder of a dynasty ; a face that was finer than that of the creator of a myth, or of a Messiah, and was, if not the most beautiful, certainly the most obviously fate-ordained that has ever appeared on earth, perhaps, since that of Jesus—which latter, though it is unknown to us, we nevertheless *know* to have been wonderful. Doubtless Napoleon's face, with the formidable concentration of audacity, of energy, of will to desire, to conquer, to dominate, which it expressed, was the antithesis of that of Jesus. It was so *vital* a face that it stands out in memory and in space like a conspicuous boundary stone marking the threshold of a world which has not yet been even glimpsed.

He had nothing here in common with his contemporaries or with men who preceded him. He was as different from them in the shape of his head as he was in the desires and the dreams which moulded it from within. And note, too, that the beauty peculiar to this astonishing physiognomy changed its character according to the stage to which the man's will-power had brought him. "He had," said some general whose name I have now forgotten, "a very long face; his complexion was stony-grey; his large, deep-sunk eyes were steady and shone like crystal." With his long, unpowdered hair and his sallow, dried-up skin he was an ascetic of action, a poet burning with fever, twitching with the greatness of his anxiety for a future which he half foresaw, playing a desperate game with fate, a game in which the sole stake, on both sides, throughout the whole time and without respite or rest, was the empire of the world—and death. Later on the hollows were filled in and the protrusions softened down so that his features tended to continue the lines of his round head—enormous and almost bald—thus forming with it one solid block. Assurance had come; definite mastery, the faith that he would seize this empire of the world as a defence against death. There were no further variations in that majestic countenance, the colour of smooth ivory, calm and stamped with the mask of strength, because the man had captivated and brought into his service all those passions which in earlier days had sometimes, and in spite of himself, expired in a gesture or had been dissipated by the accidents of life's road. His nose, finely chiselled, almost straight, and seeming to prolong the double curve of his eyebrows, the imposing cast of his temples and forehead, his strong jaw and his firm, sinuous mouth, no longer made too sharp contrast with the imperious poise of his head, which he carried high and straight: his blue eyes, set in immobile features, could not be kept still. "His prominent skull, his superb forehead, his pale, elongated face, his habitually meditative expression—these could be painted; but it was beyond anyone to depict the variations in his glance. For his glance obeyed his will with the rapidity of lightning, darting from his keen, piercing eyes, now gentle, now severe, now terrible and now caressing—all within the space of a single minute."[1] I can believe it. Henceforward he was alone in this: that he could make use of a mind assured of its weapons and no longer engrossed in a struggle against irony, insult or the misunderstanding of all men, which was exhausting to his nerves and his heart. A wonderful serenity came over his soul. He gave orders. Whether he was of noble blood or no, he was the leader of the people and of the army; he was the man who came to accomplish, for and against all men, the unique task which was expected of him and which was recognized on all sides as his as soon as he appeared.

3

In any case, the question of his nobility scarcely interested him. It was not through dilettantism, or interest, or fear that he had kept abreast of the times. He may have muttered some coarse epithet between his clenched teeth against the mob which uncovered before the Louis Capet[1] of the *Bonnet Rouge* on August 10—for he witnessed the scene from a distance—but it was not because he experienced the least tenderness for the Old Order or for its representative. It was because his aristocratic temperament was repelled by the revolting spectacle of a crowd abandoning itself to its worst instincts. The Revolution, for which he had sacrificed his position, his ease and the fortune of his family, was already rearranged and organized in his mind, wherein the formulæ of Montesquieu and Rousseau had opened up, through the fog of idealistic verbiage common to all the formulæ of the period, certain clear, straight avenues which were to lead, ten years later, to the monument of the Consulate. Thenceforth he definitely renounced the privileges of his caste and made it his invariable habit to set the right of conquest by equality against the right of possession by birth. In spite of appearances, he never changed. He always despised the hereditary nobility, which he regarded as at best only fitted to fill his antechambers. When its representatives returned to France, he did not give them back their estates, and in welcoming them his only idea was to establish a permanent continuity between the past and the future—a sign, this, of the imagination of the artist for whom time and space are always and completely contained in the moment and in the place in which he is working. When his father-in-law, the Emperor of Austria, who had had researches made in Italy to discover the origins of the Bonaparte family, wished to confer upon him his titles to nobility, he laughed and said to Metternich: "*Do you think I'm going to bother myself with such folly? My nobility dates from Montenotte.*[1] *Take those papers away.*"

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[1] Bourrienne.

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[1] Capet was the dynastic name of the early kings of France. Louis XVI was officially designated "Louis Capet" after the abolition of the monarchy.—*Translator's note.*

In that phrase is contained the whole conception of the nobility which he created—or, more accurately, which created itself. "There are secret bonds between equality and despotism. . . . When he had ascended the throne, he made the people sit beside him; a people's king, he humiliated kings and nobles in his antechambers; he levelled the rank and file, not by lowering them, but by raising them."[2] The French are equalitarians, because each of them has a vague hope of becoming a king—or something of the kind—and on that account refuses to let his neighbour be given advantages. All men have equal rights from the day of their birth. They have arms. Let them use them. I will sanctify the personal nobility of those who best know how to use them, by a title or a rank or a decoration. A fine idea, but far too simple, and destined, therefore, like all ideas which in order to be realized in fact must be incorporated in the social system, to fall at the same time as the man who was strong enough, so long as he was present, to be its master and to resist the twofold attacks of the vanities and intrigues from without, and the necessity for pleasing cheaply. It is certainly the origin of all the feudalisms—Roman, Frank, Teutonic, Norman, Arab, Japanese—of all the peoples of the world. But it is only compatible with an almost continuous state of war and the permanent necessity for a military aristocracy, which, to maintain its right, is forced to keep an incessant and pitiless supervision over its own power of command. Although its source was logical—too logical—it was one of Napoleon's most serious political mistakes. And Europe, doubtless, was less deceived by it than he was himself, and never ceased to see him as the real man of the Revolution,—for how could anyone expect a Bourbon or a Habsburg to have enough intelligence and at the same time enough candour to take Napoleon's nobles seriously? If anyone took them seriously, it was they themselves, because they were ingenuous and crude, and because they thought that it was legitimate enough for the soldier whom they had crowned to crown other soldiers.

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[1] His first victory.

[2] Chateaubriand.

In that, too, so it seems to me, he escaped ridicule, at all events as regards those of his dukes and princes who won their diadems with their blood ; as to the rest of them, one remembers the dukes *de Trou-Bonbon* and the princes *de Limonade*. But he escaped, be it noted, only because he was Napoleon, and as such did not quite realize that the incongruity of the institution came from the incompatibility that existed between a new hereditary nobility and the very principles which he desired it to represent. There, as elsewhere, he drew after him, in his gigantic adventure, all the contingencies—moral, psychological, and social—which might have imprisoned him, and declaimed his poem, which preserved its own value even though its material expression was crumbling on every side. " *What a romance my life was, however !* " It was, indeed. To start as a little Corsican mountaineer, to land one day on the Continent from a fishing-smack, scarcely more than a child in years, with no name, no money and no luggage ; twenty years afterwards to have seven or eight kings or queens as brothers or adopted children, to hand out any throne one likes to choose from among the oldest on earth or from those freshly established by one's own decree, as one might hand a tip to one's old groom or to an innkeeper, or to a policeman, to receive

Charlemagne's crown from the hands of the highest pontiff of the highest religion and place it on one's own head ; to snatch, in passing, the daughter of the oldest empire in Europe, and throw her on to one's bed ; and to do all these things in such a way that posterity has come to regard them as natural and could no longer form a conception of history if they had not happened ! A romance, indeed ! An error may be excused when from it a myth can be seen to come. At the source of every myth there is a great number of errors. But there is something which is far stronger than Truth. And that, to be exact, is Myth.

"*The wars of the Revolution ennobled the whole French nation.*" That is the central idea which excuses and explains everything. Evidently at the beginning he cherished a sincere illusion about the future of the aristocracy which he was founding. He thought that this ennoblement, won through sacrifice and danger in the terrible responsibility of the battlefield, would continue to maintain all those for whom he had sanctioned it by his distribution of honours and titles at the same level which they had learnt to achieve. He thought that they, like himself, would be uplifted. He thought that a crown, even when it was firmly fixed, could not satisfy them, since his own forehead broke through the top of the highest crown, searching beyond—he knew not where—for a mysterious diadem which he was unable to reach because —a reason unknown to him, no doubt—a noble spirit is incapable of climbing to its own height. He had his suspicions, later on—much later on, when he saw the representatives of the oldest monarchies jostling each other in his wake and begging for a word or a smile from him, prostituting themselves to persuade him to add a piece of land, a wood, a village, to their booty, asking him not only for examples of dignity, but for lessons in manners, behaving like his servants, looking like them even. And above all, when he had been brought back by the savage pack to his France, now bled white, when he was alone, overwhelmed with glory and with reverses, beaten with the rains, covered with blood-stained mud, but always, always, sustained by his incurable illusion, alone with a few poor devils still mad with love for his lonely strength—when he saw his dukes and princes abandoning him one by one: then in a lightning flash he had the time to see, and to forget, and to grasp the stump of his sword-blade for a last effort. "*Placed as I am, I can find nobility only in the mob which I have neglected, and the mob only in the nobility which I created.*"

4

Given the trend of his philosophic ideas and the form his action took, his religion was what it naturally would have been. There was in it something of that Italian superstition, innate, so to speak, and mechanical, a relic, common in Latin races, of the need of representing by symbols those unknown forces whose interaction assures the direction and the continuity of the world. There was in it, too, an atheism which was as determined as it was vague, when he was confronted with a believer, and a deism as indefinite as it was peremptory, when he faced an atheist. And deeper still within him was the mysticism of all powerful artists—that is to say, the feeling, confused perhaps, but vivid and at moments intoxicating, that he was in constant communication, by methods and for ends which he did not try to explain to himself, with the spirit pervading all life. As we have seen, he did not believe in the immortality of the soul, but in the winning, by his own efforts, of his own immortality. In the domain of religious practice, he made, in his capacity as leader of the people, the few outward gestures which he considered necessary for the maintenance of spiritual peace, and he left all men free to believe or to disbelieve—but only on condition that other men should not encroach upon his territory, any more than he did on theirs. On a certain occasion, for instance, a report was sent him, with the intention of pleasing him, on the question of canonizing Bonaventure Buonaparte, one of his Lombard ancestors, and he wrote on the margin of the paper: "*Spare me this ridicule.*"

I think that was indeed all. Any form of religious profession was outside his scope. It was an object which he manipulated or neglected at will. It was apart from his philosophy of the world, though it had helped to form it if only by its historical rôle, but he had left it behind him on his path, as one leaves a pebble of which one knows the name and the chemical composition. But it played no organic part in the machinery of his mind. He hardly ever spoke of it, for he scarcely thought about it after having pushed it from his path, once and for all. If he was pressed on the subject, this is how he answered—and the answer makes one regret that he inclined to Cuvier rather than to Lamarck, and refused to accept or to read the *Zoological Philosophy*: "*We are all simply matter. . . . Man was created by a certain temperature of the atmosphere. . . . Plants are the first link in the chain and Man is the last.*" That, it seems to me, is not so bad; it is even very daring, especially the last sentence, for in others one can find the essence of Diderot's and Buffon's doctrine. Goethe does not tell us if he talked of these things with Napoleon. But there was certainly a mutual understanding of them.

However, there it is. There was the temporal domain, and it was in that that Napoleon worked—a fact which must never be forgotten.

Religion, in that respect, was a part of his system, of which in France the *Concordat*, because of the general and positive action which it prepared, was the means. To set up religious professions one against the other, or atheism against them in combination, when he wanted to spread throughout Europe, not only the principles, but above all the legal realization of liberty and equality—that was really the issue at stake. Liberty and equality in worship were inscribed in the Rights of Man. He would give liberty and equality to those creeds which were oppressed either by the Revolution or by the old Europe. He reverted to the policy of Henri IV, the only one worthy of a free man who, as an Unbeliever and at the same time as the leader of his people, knew that his rôle as leader and as Unbeliever was to assure to all the Believers amongst his people the right to believe what they chose in a form which pleased them. But note this. He put strict limits to the frontiers of their domain. The spiritual was to be free on condition that it confined itself to its own sphere and did not enter that of the temporal under any pretext whatever. The Pope was to learn something of that. Admittedly there came a day when Napoleon, face to face with him, took up a high-handed attitude. He was irritated by a resistance that even the most obstinate armies had never offered to him, and in consequence he was lacking in delicacy. His temperament, his ideas, and his actions made him the antithesis of Christianity and he thought to employ the Pope as an official: a Latin conception, this, not a Jewish or Greek one; Catholic rather than Christian, and a direct result of the vast æsthetic system according to which he visualized the society which he was organizing. He was conducting an immense orchestra in which the Pope was playing an instrument. The Pope wished to play out of time. He did not expel him from the orchestra, but he broke his bow.

For him Catholicism was only important in that it constituted the religion of the majority of the people who had chosen him. Apart from that, he treated Catholicism as he treated Protestantism or as he treated Judaism, or Mohammedism—with benevolence, but no more. "*Conquerors,*" he said, "*ought to understand the mechanism of all religions and to talk the language of all of them. They ought to be able to be Mussulmans in Egypt and Catholics in France. And by that I mean—protectors.*" The saying of a leader, who had other ends in view than throwing religions one against the other, because he considered that the time when such struggles could be fruitful was past. The saying of an artist of action, scarcely intelligible to the men of his epoch—and to many others as well—an epoch wherein whoever was not an antichristian after the manner of Voltaire or a deist after the manner of Rousseau was regarded as a "fanatic." The laughter of his lieutenants over his attitude at Cairo was assuredly the laughter of old soldiers, who, if he had not been there, would have gone booted into the mosques on the grounds that it was as foolish to believe in God in Cairo as it was in Paris. They could not realize that he, like all deep-thinking men, had grasped the fatalistic character of great human religions—a point which seems to me vital if one is to work in the grand style.

Was that all? No. There was, in this respect, one thing, under Heaven, which he could not conquer. Perhaps because he bore the thing within himself, though he applied it to other ends, and pursued it relentlessly. A thing which no man can conquer, because no man can understand it. Because it is the unshakable certainty (as much in the highest spirit of all religions as in certain noble minds isolated amongst mankind) that the heart of God would cease to beat if the human mind understood it. He could do nothing against the Pope, and he knew it. "*The priests keep the soul and throw the corpse to me.*" Yes. Everything issuing from the desire for that embrace in order to consent to the embrace and to allow itself to be measured was dead. And in that, without any doubt, lay the last and the most bitter sustenance of his despair.

VI

His Relations with Men

I

THOSE historians who solemnly bring an action against Napoleon in the name of morality are like some clergyman, fresh from the seminary, fat, pink, and virginal, lecturing a great artist, already old and harrowed with thought, on paternity and love. And, after all, that is what morality is.

True, the "governing classes" preferred, and always will prefer, Louis Philippe to Prometheus: that is natural enough. Let us suppose that Napoleon had put a definite end to the war after Marengo, as was expected—and as he himself at one moment certainly hoped to do—and had continued the work of the Consulate to the end of his life, administering justice, opening up ports, cutting canals, launching ships, making roads, until he had died from an apoplectic fit in the midst of his Council at the age of sixty-six. Obviously he would then have left an unassailable impression on the memory of all the irresponsible trustees of the happiness of mankind. But he would not have lighted in the imagination of those few men who are responsible for the grandeur of mankind the fire which nourishes them. Speeches at electoral meetings and at prize distributions, Academy Discourses, Reports on Mutual Aid Societies, might have been enriched with flowing periods, certainly. But would we have had Dostoievsky ?

Morality is to faith what calligraphy is to style. When will that be realized ? Never.

To have described Napoleon adequately would have required the powers of the author of *Coriolanus*. Actually the task fell upon a little attorney from Marseilles, fierce and emphatic, sly and base, an emperor crowned with water-lilies, a strategist in slippers, who did his utmost to reduce the hero to his own dimensions with the idea of adding to his stature. All his contemporaries, and all who came after him, even the greatest, judged him from their own point of view—that is, from that of *bourgeois* endowed by the organizer of the Revolution which had given them their privileges for a whole century—or as pastors, high-principled certainly, but more blind than Milton. All of them. Lanfrey and Norvins, Barbier and Walter Scott, Carlyle, Chateaubriand and Emerson themselves, and Hugo—Homais [1] at Patmos—amongst the most conspicuous. All, except Stendhal and Goethe, doubtless. Taine devotes a chapter to erecting a monumental image of him, and a second one to breaking it. Quinet understood very little about him. Tolstoi absolutely nothing. And yet . . . and yet all of them flew towards him like moths to a candle. Poets, even when they preached, even when they moralized, whether they hated him or whether they loved him, recognized him as a member of their family. Why did not Beethoven dedicate his symphony to Marceau, or to Hoche? "*A man such as I is either a god or a devil.*" That is true. But how was it that there were so few amongst those who saw him as either a god or a devil to realize that the Devil is only another aspect of God?

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[1] Homais—a character in *Madame Bovary*.—*Translator's note.*

Whether for the purpose of cursing him or of excusing him, the most perspicacious among them saw him as a man devoid of the moral sense. But even they were wrong. And I do not know if that is a pity, for, regarded thus, Napoleon—that "incomprehensible being"[1]—would be more easy to understand, and would be more pure. But no. He was not devoid of the moral sense. He was not even immoral. In his private life, I mean. Like myself or yourself, like those who praise or blame him, he was honest enough; he was more honest, even, than the average man. His was that normal honesty which becomes a habit with the majority of distinguished men, who only employ

[1] Chateaubriand.

indirect methods or mean little tricks because some person or other is obstructing their path. But in his public life it was another matter. With his knowledge of men he had little faith, alas, in their purity; therein lay his own impurity. He made use of morality without possessing its illusions. An incurable weakness as soon as one works in direct contact with action: a weakness which undermined his own. Social morality, like religion, was simply an instrument which he needed and which he used, as he used other instruments, to maintain the equilibrium of the peoples over whom he ruled and by means of which he enhanced their offensive power and their productive capacity. Just as an artist needs good canvas, good brushes and colours, so he needed something plain and solid which would ensure the efficiency of the material side of his work. In that respect he reversed commonly accepted values; since, for him, order and social peace, instead of being the ends, were the means. A monster? So be it. But a monster who at once realized facts as they were. These things may have been no more than tools to him, but they were of such a character that with them he was able to construct out of ruins the only possible building in which the desired order could for even a moment be housed.

It is true that he did not encumber himself with transcendent metaphysics. He did not ask himself what morality was in itself: whether it was fruitful or sterilizing, legitimate or without foundations. He governed. He hunted down rogues, thieves and defaulters. In a few weeks from the date of his coming into power, the general anarchy which had prevailed was stamped out—by means which, though sometimes brusque, were legal. A few examples only were made, but they were well chosen: "*Severity prevents more misdemeanours than it actually suppresses.*" The streets and roads became safe again at night. Officials were suddenly honest; magistrates just; revenue officers disinterested. Peace returned to the towns, security to the country-side. Work began again everywhere. Two or three years were enough in which to draw up and promulgate the codes. And these codes he discussed clause by clause with the lawyers, surprising them and often beating them on their own ground. To the clearing up of the common habitation of society, littered for the past ten years with the ruins of so many moral ideas that no one could find his way about in it, he brought that Eastern wisdom and Roman positivism which has provided all the nations with their spiritual framework for the last four or five thousand years. "*Public morality,*" he said, "*is founded on justice, which, far from excluding energy, is, on the contrary, simply the result of it.*" In fact, the strong man protects the weak and allows the strong to assert himself. There is no other peace except the *Pax Romana,* assertive against violence by a display of force in action, maintained against trickery by a display of force in reserve, and gradually extended, like corn conquering uncultivated land and preceded yard by yard by the ploughshare in the furrow. But only on condition that a strong man holds the handles of the plough.

2

It does not seem to me that the original sin of his political fortune can be made chargeable to his account at the Day of Judgment. Democracy has its dogmas. And amongst the most important of them is its respect for law, even if the law is decrepit, even if it has quite obviously ceased to respond to the most urgent needs, even if preceding outrages—such as was the case as regards Brumaire—have modified the law to the advantage of its incense-bearers. It is, however, for the powerful man to realize that the hour has come and to set up against the written law other laws—laws which are profound, hidden, organic and superior to the written law. When the spirit battles with the letter and the letter wins the day, I do not think that lay society has more to gain than has religious society in similar circumstances. Always and in every case to condemn a violent political measure is to condemn every vital movement against existing ideas and accepted formulæ, whenever it takes place. It is to condemn the artist, the scientist, or the inventor who, in order to introduce a new harmony between common interests and creative intelligence, in art, science, or industry, advances unhesitatingly against the combined forces of passive intelligence and personal interests. It is to condemn the sailor who cuts away the mast with an axe when the ship is about to founder because she is carrying too much canvas. Perhaps it is natural, however, that this dogma should be propagated so as to preserve such a framework of society that the first-comer will not feel himself authorized to break it at any moment for his own personal profit. "*One can have little conception of the march of genius if one imagines that it will allow itself to be crushed under forms. Forms are made for mediocrity, and it is sound enough that the latter should only be able to move within the circle of regulations.*" When it is a great mind or a great will-power which undertakes the adventure of breaking through that circle, those who live in mind and in will-power recognize the fact without difficulty and absolve the audacity.[1]

One virtue, amongst many, is responsible for the greatness of this man: his character. The brief courage of the battlefield is not the most difficult of all. So many eyes are upon you and death keeps you waiting for so short a time ! The courage to live is of a higher order. Life sets its snares at every twist of the road. Life waits and has unlimited time at its disposal. It is certain of surprising you. It knows you to be lethargic when faced with the constant effort required to act and to think and to preserve it, ascending and combative, within you, each time that you have won a victory over it and hope to make a pause. The soldiers of death are drawn up in mass before you, all armed against you, who are alone, and you know it. Decision is swift, and if they miss you, may give you a long and honoured life of ease. And, moreover, you are scarcely conscious, you are drunk, you go forward. . . . But the soldiers of life are invisible and numberless ; they are the passions, the rancours, the complex interests of all living men and the secret conspiracies which are formed against any man who tends to rise above the common level ; they are your own passions, your own rancours, your own interests which urge you not to rise or only make you appear to rise by lifting you on tiptoe or by putting a cardboard crown on your head. . . . I doubt if Napoleon ever displayed the same courage as did Ney, or Murat or Lasalle, except during those ten decisive minutes when it was vital for him to show it. But Ney, Murat and Lasalle trembled before Napoleon.

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[1] See Appendix. Note 15.

" *Your husband,*" he wrote to Caroline, " *is a* *brave man on the battlefield. But he has no moral courage.*" Now it is moral courage which shines forth in every act and in every circumstance of Napoleon's life. His whole existence was given up to an assault upon the world; an assault made by himself alone, with his heart and his mind. *Brumaire* was certainly not the first manifestation of this, for Italy and Egypt had preceded *Brumaire*; and the supreme command is not in the realm of military courage, but in that of moral courage. . . . There was, in his history, one atrocious act. Yet that act was significant of a courage infinitely harder to achieve than that required for exposing himself to death: it was "*mental courage*," the fitness to make an heroic decision, which, whatever else it might have been, was heart-rending. Moreover, it was not a mistake, a fact which, in my opinion, absolves him. At Jaffa he had to choose between the massacre of his Arab prisoners and death by famine both for them and for his army if he spared them. He considered the matter, and then had them killed. . . . It is easy on that account to minimize a great man. Any act which in the first instance rouses the universal moral sense to reprobation in circumstances in which conscience ought to play a part, is styled proud folly, insensibility, impulsiveness, crime. But the conscience of a great man is a much more formidable thing than is usually supposed. For universal moral opinion enters into the calculations of a great man. He dispenses with morality, but never with conscience. Morality draws up rules, conscience will have none of them. And if it did, it would no longer be conscience. Such and such a deed, authorized by morality, lacerates the conscience of some men. Another deed, which morality condemns, has, for other men, no reprehensible aspect. In those dramatic decisions, watched by every eye, which a great man is called upon to make, public morality and his own conscience are always in conflict. Thenceforth the moralists can play their game. And the interpretation of the motives which actuate him becomes a prey for feeble men to haggle over. "*Power, coolness, courage and resolution only added to the number of his enemies. His grandeur of soul was called pride!*"[1]

Nevertheless, before 1814 and the return from Elba, *Brumaire,* which was on a par with these, was undoubtedly the highest sign of moral courage vouchsafed to man as characteristic of the hero of action since the classic day when Cæsar crossed the Rubicon. Remember that Napoleon had against him the law itself, the written law, the most formidable symbol which had been discovered since the Holy Books, and which a revolution that he loved, that he approved of, and that he desired to save from itself, had sanctioned through the unanimous consent of all the most generous minds. Remember that he had before him the idealistic rampart constructed during the past hundred years by Montesquieu, Rousseau, Voltaire and Kant, between the theocratic society which, like they, he wished to abolish and the civil society which, like they, he wished to inaugurate.[1] Remember that if he failed it meant more than probable death; it meant certain dishonour. Remember, above all, that there was within him an incomparable power; that he was thirty; that he had a whole life—already the most glorious in the world—before him in which to display this power of his along the lines which he had up till then been following; that he realized that his power surpassed all that men knew of it and all that he himself guessed; that he gambled on the fall of one single card, on the chance of multiplying that power to infinity or of annihilating it, in one second, for ever. Remember that he dared. And then judge him.

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[1] *Elison et Eugénie.*

"*Civil war,*" he once said, "*and civil war alone, produces men of courage.*" He realized it well enough on that terrible afternoon, when he stood, an unarmed soldier, facing five hundred men threatening him with daggers. He was very close to giving way, as he stood there digging his nails into his bleeding face. Amongst the crowd of deputies gesticulating and shouting in the name of the law—their pittance—

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[1] See Appendix. Note 14.

it was he who represented mind and the rest of them matter. The aristocrat in him was disgusted. "The terrible *Hors la Loi!* that Jacobin shout which was equivalent to 'Crucify him!'" threw him into a kind of nervous stupor which showed that his resolution was the fruit of many an internal fight and victory. It is not by the nature of his act, nor yet by its consequences, that its greatness must be measured. It is by the deep motives inspiring it, by its purport, by its range, by the cruel perspicacity of the man who realized these things. The *coup d'état* of an Augereau had not the quality of the *coup d'état* of a Bonaparte. In the former case an old soldier who disliked "lawyers" saw a good trick which he could play upon them. But with the latter, it was a case of a deep-thinking man who knew that a decisive act, which it depended on him alone to commit or not to commit, could crush his imagined epic in embryo or could make it issue forth, winged and ready to bend the future to his will.

His strength fed upon itself; it could be wounded, it could be momentarily shaken, but it could not be crushed—even by the blackest crime against public morality. And that explains why his efforts were not drowned in the blood of the Duc d'Enghien when he delivered his third stroke against it. For it seemed, on the contrary, that whilst damaging the immense moral credit which he had acquired in Europe, this murder made him a being apart from other men, a formidable recluse wandering horror-stricken in his despairing glory, plunging deeper day by day into the desert of an imagination that was for ever outstripping his acts, and that no one, not even he himself, could follow without a kind of dread which repelled other men but which intoxicated him. It was his great regret, this murder. When he heard of it, he grew pale and shut himself up alone: he was gloomy for months on end. After it, he was not the same man. He came back to it twenty times. He was the first to mention it in front of persons who no longer gave it a thought. Plainly consumed with anguish, he asked them what their feelings were about it. If he spoke of it he called it a "*catastrophe.*" It was the one incident in his life which he regarded with painful uneasiness and about which he experienced a desire to consult other men's opinions. He always and unhesitatingly declared himself responsible for it—although that is debatable, and although he had been wrought upon beforehand by his *entourage*; although, moreover, he was almost certainly deceived at the very moment of the stroke, for there was an obscure intrigue going on all round him which has never been brought to light. He declared himself responsible, but in his attitude towards it, and in what he said, one feels that there was a confused struggle going on within him; one would be inclined to say that his pride forbade him both to admit his greatest mistake (when he admitted so many others) and to betray the agents of it.

The true secret motive for this deed, I honestly believe, was that since the *machine infernale* and the episode of Cadoudal he was afraid of assassins, and that in order to stay their hands by an act of terror he obeyed the suggestions of the evil angels round him, Talleyrand, Fouché and all those who, under the table on which his glory was proffered to the world, snapped up the filth and the bones which all glory produces; for the more dazzling and the more extensive is the life of a great man, the deeper is his misery and the larger is the number of tributary lives that are drawn into its wake. He inveighed in public against the conspirators who were aiming at him. He accused them, loudly and violently, of preventing his projects from maturing, of not understanding his intentions, and especially—oh, especially!—of not appreciating his greatness. Violent death was a normal risk of war, and he accepted it without flinching. But in time of peace he regarded a violent death as a useless risk which would not increase by one atom the weight of his authority, but which, on the contrary, would weaken it and would hinder the logical and harmonious development that was his dream; it would be like a grain of sand in the works of a watch, a clot of blood in the heart. He was afraid of assassins; he had an irresistible dread of a mad face thrust close to his at a totally unexpected moment, of a knife-blade twisting in his intestines, of a hatchet crashing on his skull, of an explosion blowing off his arm or his leg, of a slow martyrdom in the middle of a filthy crowd, with women's finger-nails and scissors tearing his face or mutilating his vital organs. This was shown clearly enough by the pitiable disguise which he adopted when he was going into exile, in order to get through the howling mob which was waiting for him near Avignon—that town notorious for massacres carried out with bill-hooks and logs of wood. He would not resign himself to such an unclean end; his whole nervous being shuddered at it, strained away from it. Hence that tool of his, his police—the most abject tool that there is, but one that no power has ever been able to dispense with—the tool that was much more wounding to him than to other rulers, because, though he was very noble, the police were very base; hence his convulsive reaction as an Italian who knew what intrigue meant, and who, with little belief in the disinterestedness of the greedy jaws which surrounded him, threw bones to them so that they should guard him well; hence that gag on the Press; hence the disastrous murder which led him on to further suspicions, further vigilance, further severity. Grant him pardon. He bled. Let him who has never bled reproach him for the blood which he spilt.

When one remembers the arms which Puritan England used against Napoleon, the money with which she watered Europe to undermine his power there, her subterranean intrigues, the acts of violence which she committed, in time of peace, against small nations who were not engaged in her duel with France, one is prepared to be somewhat indulgent as regards the morality which governs the relations between peoples, as soon as it becomes a question for them of not dying under the blockade or by force of arms.[1] Did not Austria have the plenipotentiaries of the Republic massacred a few months before Bonaparte's access to power? War is a great immorality, and before a truth so vital, let us agree to ask ourselves whether it should be laid to the charge of men and not to that of God. Given war, a whirlwind of forces is drawn into the maelstrom it provokes, in which heroism and evil are swallowed up pell-mell so that it is hard to separate them. The Bayonne affair was not pleasant; it was perhaps the least pleasant incident in Napoleon's life. Yet, if one remembers the idiocy of the Spanish royal house in washing its dirty linen in front of him like servants caught out in some misdemeanour, the obscene and stuttering fatuousness of the father, the erotic fury round which centred the policy of the mother, the fierce and delirious baseness of the son, the supplications with which they overwhelmed everybody to deliver them from each other, one perceives that Napoleon's disgust was scarcely likely to conceal from him this new vision which danced before his eyes—the conquest of Spain, and by means of it of the New World. He was vanquished in the end, vanquished thanks to this very vision, which five years later led him into the abyss. There is in that something to satisfy those who are fond of the "providential" view of history, and who will never put it to themselves that the end of the Inquisition and the appearance of modern influences in Spain and in America were not payment enough for the crime. Ah, yes! "These miserable Spaniards that one wanted to civilize in spite of themselves. . . ." And then a smile. It is the reasoning that is always put forward against every strong movement which threatens mortal inertia from without. As always, little is known of the secret activities of history; little was known of Napoleon. "*I was ill involved in all that business, I confess; the immorality of it was too patent and its injustice too cynical. The whole affair remains very wicked—because I was overcome. For the crime was only presented in its hideous nakedness,*

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[1] See Appendix. Note 17.

deprived of all the grandeur and the numerous benefits which were comprised in my intentions. . . ."

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It seems to me that the above, coupled with another saying of his, reveals to us, and even defines for us, the whole morality of action. At St. Helena he said to someone who was asking him about his return from Elba : "*From Cannes to Grenoble I was an adventurer. In the latter town I became a sovereign again.*" Is that to say that success alone makes moral a hazardous action which is contrary to custom and against the laws ? No, if success is only an end. Yes, if success carries with it that dynamic characteristic, that delirium of conquest which makes a fresh departure of it and charges it with consequences so fruitful that an age-old equilibrium is shaken thereby, and unknown ways are opened to the courage and the energy of all men. Everything depends upon the quality of the deed, and, in a last analysis, upon the quality of the man. "*I am not as other men are, and the laws of morality and of convention cannot have been made for me.*" Every deed which stirs up life and puts an end to stagnation is a moral deed, even if it is regarded as a crime by those accustomed to the minimum of effort. To the man whose habit it is to attempt such deeds as these a rebuff is no longer the punishment for a crime, as for an ordinary man, but, rather, the penalty for a mistake. It is a false step made by a great autonomous organism which creates its own morality for itself because it lives with such a vigour that all men follow in its path. He was not born to obey the law but to make it. And it was in obedience to his own law that he imposed it upon all those who had not the ability to discover and formulate their own. Is there not a vast difference between such a man and a common malefactor? I think I have made my point clear. He delivered a multitude of men, and in some cases whole generations of them, from the tyranny of liberty.

As to his constant use of force—there is a universal law which lays down that sooner or later force must be used, in the course of one, or ten, or twenty centuries, to impose upon men the rhythm which will deliver them. No man can do anything against it: not Napoleon any more than any other man. For in that also, and in that above all, he obeyed.

It would seem that the Just Man has always and instinctively loved force and that revolutions are born where the social order is empty of living forms and where force is out of adjustment. The great Europeans and the obscure masses of the common peoples up to 1808 always gave Napoleon an enthusiastic welcome, even when he came among them in the fury of war. And that was because an organized and coherent force brought a new social order. A strange instinct, this, of just-minded men who are the poets of the realm of morals! Already the prophets of Israel were calling upon the Assyrian Sargon; and one sees this incredible paradox, probably necessary to the spiritual life of the world—one sees the inhabitants of some small kingdom, weak and corrupt, perhaps, but more or less peaceable, hoping that a monster would come amongst them with his army of executioners to punish weakness and purify them with fire. I am quite aware that for those who call down upon their people punishment from Heaven—or from elsewhere, it is much the same in reality—there are other things besides the hatred of him who can command in the domain of ideas for him who cannot command in the domain of action. There is the jealousy of the man who wins no praise (and who, moreover, despises it) for the man who insidiously wins it all. There is this, too: the moral inferiority of a neighbour is only too visible, whereas a distant power assumes a divine character because its workings are not seen. But in the end, what revolts the just-minded man, what alienates the artist and stirs the people to indignation, is absence of imagination and grandeur in a man of action. From the moment when he possesses these, the artists, the just-minded, the common people, recognize him as their brother: Beethoven sings, Goethe observes, Chateaubriand is curious but admiring—and the world is changed. I suppose that the whole of history is due to this antagonism between exceptional thought which organizes and ordinary action which does not.

I imagine, therefore, that the exceptional man is he who orders, who by the force of his thought or the force of his action fixes the values which society expects, and does so, be it noted, by reversing them in his own person. Thus the values against which Nietzsche came to rebel were those which Napoleon found scattered and proceeded to rivet upon the world with the iron chain of his Codes. But he violated them first of all. And it will always be thus. God means the obedience of the common herd to the law powerfully dictated by some criminal in the grand style who knows God's intention. Thus the artist and the just-minded man, thus the conqueror and, to put it plainly, the dictator in every direction in which life can go, are the expected creators of forms of civilization which morality and custom are called upon to consolidate as soon as they have disappeared.

The dictator—and Napoleon less than any other because he was greater than any other—is no more without morals than he is immoral or moral. These words are meaningless. He is a freak. Everything which, in the majority of men, is regarded as vicious may be virtuous where he is concerned, if it becomes active mastery capable of bearing fruit. To such a man, power, voluptuousness, war, are like wine, though to so many other men they may be poisonous. His pride is the delirium of his vast inward life, his despotism is the feeling that he bears justice in his bosom, his ambition is only the sign of his creative faculty, and when he violates the law it is because he desires to have a child by it. What are called the weaknesses of a great man are often only the nourishment of a strength which is being exercised and developed on difficult ground. What is essential is the increase of its original worth, and there is nothing to show that it would thus increase without the so-called lapses—experiences, in reality—which mediocre minds search for in the most paltry circumstances of a life that is scrutinized day after day. Morality is made of iron, but genius of flesh and blood. The sole penalty of a great man's faults is the diminution of his inward greatness.

VII

His Relations with Women

I

IT would seem that not one of the snares which the adventure of life sets in the path of all men was able to find Napoleon at fault or to diminish his greatness. And the most dangerous of all, the one which catches the most masterful of men precisely because it appears in their path more than anywhere else, was set in vain for him. It rent his flesh, certainly, but it never succeeded in attracting the attention of his eyes even for a second; for his eyes were fixed too high. The masterful man is a prey to the torments which women can inflict, for two reasons: because his outward power attracts them, and because his inward power is derived simply from his formidable sexual instinct. People have attempted to make out that Napoleon was asexual. But, as with his lack of the moral sense, this is far too simple a way of avoiding the difficult task of examining his heart. Perhaps he did not love women much. But he loved love, and that is much more dangerous.

His manner with women, with which he is

reproached, was really an indication of that brutal timidity which constitutes the means of defence of those whom love attracts too much and who are aware of its perils. The fact that he once uttered the pretty phrase, "*Women are the soul of conversation*," reveals in him the existence of a profound sense of the sentimental part which ought to be played by those whom his brusque manners—almost tantamount sometimes to a kind of soldierly coarseness—were always trying to thrust out of his way. With this uneasiness was mingled an indefinable desire to remember and to make women remember their essential function, in order to prove to himself and to them that he had nothing to expect from them nor they from him. His remark to Mme de Staël has not been understood. This mental virago, pretentious, and ugly into the bargain, who wearied him with her assiduity and her praises, could not have been set back in her place within her own sex with more vigour and with more justice for that sex and for the respective independence of the two speakers.[1] In the sexual war, this particular weapon is, it is true, the most lacking in elegance, but it is undoubtedly the most faithful and the most efficacious.

He was in love with love, then, but, as his numerous adventures seem to bear witness, he very soon did all that was necessary to put it in its place and to fit it in with his own plan; but only after he had suffered so much from it that he might perhaps have succumbed had it not been broken against a fiercer passion about which his pride gave him warning. From the time when he had begun to climb the ladder of fortune, he never allowed the terrible god to encroach upon the central idea which was established in his breast rather than in his brain, and which led him on towards the continual growth of his real grandeur. Mme de Vaudrey, Mlle Lacoste, Mme Gazzani, Eléonore Ravel, Mme de Barral, Mme Mathis, Mlle Guillebeau—not one of them obtained any favour—beyond royal alms—except that of coming into his room at night by a secret staircase in order that Josephine (whom, by the way, he no longer loved) should not suffer and in order that the dignity of the Master should remain at the high level of the rôle which he was playing. Even though his adventure with Mme Fourés at Cairo betokened a short-lived folly, with its placard for the army to read and the husband's embarkation for France—a vile act, but who has never perpetrated a vile act for love's sake? Even though Mme Walewska, whom he loved keenly and who doubtless might have been a cause of cruel suffering to him if her natural nobility, the humility of her attitude and her devotion for the hero had allowed the least suspicion to enter her soul, obtained

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[1] See Appendix. Note 18.

(without any access whatever, it should be stated, to the political domain) the privilege of frequent meetings, at balls, dinners, fêtes, where both of them could enjoy that secret understanding which preserved its strong flavour even when, and perhaps especially because, every one was aware of it. Even though, in his affairs with Grassini, the singer, and with George, the tragic actress, it seemed, by the character of his choice—for he adored deep voices and the heroic drama which exalts and ennobles the heart—that the illusionist in him, the imaginative, the romantic, were taking precedence over the man of brains who normally controlled his senses, like one driving five blood-horses with a firm hand. Concerning himself, he would never allow even a suspicion of a single one of those intrigues with which autocrats so often consent to be degraded. He dismissed on the spot a woman who had pleased him as soon as he learnt that Talleyrand had placed her in his path with the idea that he (Tallyerand) might, in contact with such a man, play the part of Richelieu's marshal. Without loitering in the dangerous by-ways of sentimental delirium he indulged his caprice. "*In war as in love, one must take a close look at oneself, if one is to bring matters to a conclusion.*" The future character of almost all his affairs would seem to show that of his own free will he prevented himself from being loved—a much rarer thing perhaps than preventing oneself from loving—and that may well pass as being the most difficult victory which he won over himself, because the moment when he feels himself loved is without doubt the only one in which a great man can escape from the illusion of his solitude.

2

It would be surprising if, after his marriage with Josephine, he had not been accused of responding to motives of interest rather than those of love. Yet she was the one woman whom he passionately loved, against whom he never knew how to defend himself, and who provided the occasion of that first cruel experience which saved him for ever by teaching him to suffer in silence rather than to surrender a single particle of his will or his mind. From his early youth, with his fiery heart, his taciturn pride, the insults that he had endured, his romantic reading—Rousseau, Ossian, *Paul et Virginie*, *Werther* already perhaps—he seemed destined to be the victim of the first passing woman whose smile expressed neither irony nor disdain towards him. As quite a young officer stationed in the South he had several sharp encounters of the heart—notably with Désirée Clary, the future queen of Sweden, and with Mlle de Colombier, who, it should be noted, was much older than himself. In fact, later on, in Paris, he took, naïvely enough, a very violent fancy to a certain Mme de Permon, whom he wished to marry, although she already had children and was also much older than he was. To young men of an ardent imagination the woman who is already mature represents the deepest, warmest and most complete mystery of love. It is a mark of the ingenuous not to foresee grey hairs, wrinkles and flabby flesh on the morrow of passion. The woman whom he married in 1796 was five years older than he was; she had a daughter and a son, large needs, and no money whatever.

It was this act which has been stigmatized; yet to those who have always considered love disinterestedly and favoured well-ordered, wise and honest lives wherein not one act goes beyond the correct alignment, it is an act which displays an almost incredible candour. Josephine, like Mme de Permon, had debts and nothing else as her fortune. What with Barras and other men who were anxious to be quit of an embarrassing and expensive ex-mistress, dragging two growing children in her wake, it was all the more easy to set an ambush for him, and she assisted in preparing it willingly enough; for the Commander-in-Chief of the Army of the Interior was a much better match for Beauharnais' widow, who was ruined financially, morally and politically, than was the aforesaid widow for the general whose lucky star had been visibly in the ascendant from the time when he had saved the Convention. He fell blindly into the trap; he was a nice young man and not yet very knowing. He wanted to have his wife to himself, the kind of wife who would be alluring, who would dress in the height of fashion, who would be provocative and even a little perverse, and whose pretty mincing features, whose sensuous movements, whose chatter and whose somewhat harsh voice gave promise of pleasures as yet unknown. Did he know her habits? Probably not, or, if he did, he regarded her as maligned. A fine opportunity for this Didier to reinstate Marion.

We know the rest: his departure for Italy after two days of delirium with her, his anxiety, his jealousy, his fears that she did not love him, the wild letters of this child of Corsica, who had been brought up on romantic stories, and who now hid his impressions from no one, in his speech, or his acts or his letters. All those who were in contact with him at that time acknowledged that he "often spoke of her and of his love for her with the expansiveness and the illusions of a very young man."[1] We know of the unprecedented brilliance of his first victories, the quickly-won fame of the young general, his appeals to her to come and join him and share his love. We know of the tricks of this profligate to delay her departure, the excuses she invented—even that she was

[1] Marmont.

pregnant!—to prolong her very pleasant stay in Paris, where, thanks to him, she had become the cynosure of society. We know of her arrival at Milan, where, half mad with excitement, he joined her only to leave her again, in tears, to return to the army; of her behaviour with junior officers, her flight to Genoa as soon as he wanted to return to her, the fever into which she threw him, the boredom which she experienced when she was with him. We know that she was unfaithful to him, the eagle, in favour of cocks and turkeys; that every one knew it except, naturally enough, he himself; that it was always she who should have asked for forgiveness, and that it was always he who implored it. We know that his glory left her cold—that glory by which she lived, and which, perhaps without her suspecting it, had produced her unexpected good fortune and her unhoped-for joys. We know that she had not that feminine heroism which urges a woman to be, by all the means at her disposal, a recompense and a consolation—and all the more so for a man such as he was. Yet it was not her fault; she did not love him. Women do not love because they admire. They admire because they love. And possibly men are not unlike women in that respect.

We know his unwavering generosity towards her. We know that when he was in Egypt he received accurate information as to the way she was behaving in France and had been behaving from the very day of their marriage. We know of his suffering, his revolt, his resolve to repudiate her, the comedy that she played at his door on the night of his return; his firmness at first and his subsequent brusque tenderness when she brought to his very door her two weeping children whom he loved. We know that he never went back on the forgiveness which he extended to her then with so much difficulty; that neither in deed nor in word did he exact the least vengeance on her lovers—whose identity he knew. We know that he crowned her with his own hands with tender graciousness and that he never allowed her to appear to suffer. We know that although he had made up his mind to divorce her, he hesitated for years, out of pity and superstitious tenderness, before informing her of a decision which with the greatest difficulty in the world overrode his own scruples and the tears—real or feigned—which she shed in his presence. What strikes us most in this man whom people have tried to represent, on the occasion of his greatest and his most naïve love-affair, as having discounted his glory in order to obtain the favours of a middle-aged strumpet, is his purity of heart.

"To everything connected with pleasure," said someone in close contact with him, "he gave colour and poetic names." From the moment when he ceased to think of his personal strength as being menaced, from the moment, in fact, when he discovered the love which the liberty of marriage permits, he unbent and abandoned his defensive attitude. When he once had the responsibility and the dignity of absolute power, we no longer find a trace of the furtive characteristic which made his escapades seem like those of a *bourgeois* going in fear of discovery. To the plump Austrian maiden which the defeated Holy Roman Empire sent as an offering to the Minotaur he behaved with the imagination and the impatience of an amorous subaltern. Despite the protocol, he surprised her in her carriage, so that he might embrace her two hours earlier. He lavished presents and attentions upon her. He spoilt her. She told every one and she wrote to her own people to say that she was the happiest of wives. Later, when he was in exile, he heard of her unseemly conduct, of her ingratitude, and of her weak-mindedness, but he made no allusion to it. On the contrary, he praised her for the happiness which she had given him. I feel sure that it was because he realized the unalterable freshness of his temperament as a lover that he sought, in instinctive defence of his illusion, to preserve it by marriage from the blows of experience and at the same time to preserve himself from the torments which experience inflicts and from the intolerable slavery which it may so easily impose.

3

But listen! Terrible suffering was necessary before he could discover within himself some eternal power capable of limiting his need for that experience. He must have wept in the night, gnawed his sheets, his own hands, known the horror of insomnia, wandered about all day in fearful anxiety which was followed by a mad short-lived joy or by a burning desire for death. He must have learnt, in those terrible hours, to squeeze his heart between his two hands so as to crush its beating; he must have opened his wound himself and probed in it to discover in its depths the greatest accumulation of ill which man can experience. He had to find his strength and his genius at the very centre of his devastated being. Notwithstanding everything, he had to act, to invent, to order, to appear to other men, in spite of his pallor, which they could see, and in spite of his excitement, which fired them, as resolute as ever and nobler than they were.

Let it be remembered that the maddest moments in his love for his wife and those when he was at the same time the most tormented with desire and suspicion, exactly coincided with his first battles, that is to say, with the decisive moment when he would, according to his action, disappear from history or assert in it the strange power which he was conscious of possessing. Picture those nights of anxious waiting when the coming dawn would be that of his last day or of his finest triumph, those tragic days when the least mistake in manœuvre might risk the loss of his army and the ruin of his career and of the world which depended upon him. . . . And all this cooped up in the breast of a boy of twenty-seven, maddened with the itch, his eyes hollow with overwork, scarcely sleeping at all, and tortured by his love. I can imagine that later on the victories which he won both over others and over himself seemed very much easier to him. For at this moment the least absent-mindedness because he had just received a letter a little less banal than usual; the least desire to be alone in order to face his suffering better because some sharp suspicion was making him sweat in agony; the least hesitation because the last courier who had arrived at the exact second when he had to make a vital decision had brought him no single world from her; the least glance behind him where he knew that his faithless adored one was only a few hours away from him—any of these could bring down at a blow and in one second the whole framework of his plans. Yet, in order to sleep, or rest, or write a letter or answer one, or slip away between two battles to see this woman for an hour's voluptuousness or for the dreadful pleasure of lacerating himself with her bored behaviour, he never deferred for one second the orders which he had to give, or the responsibility which he had to take, or the action which began at the precise moment which he had previously decided upon. "*A soldier,*" he wrote, apropos a suicide, in a general order issued at this time, "*ought to conquer grief and the melancholy of his passions.*"

That is not all. France and Italy were at his feet. Women offered themselves. The beautiful Grassini, to whom, several years later, he gave, as alms, a few months of love, was on her knees at his door. But he did not open it. The hero could not, would not, be consoled. In the fever in which pride, ambition, the craving for glory and action, jealousy, desire, physical suffering, the transport of continual victory, the gloomy torments of sentimental despair, consumed his emaciated body, his livid skin, scarred with bleeding furrows, his great blue eyes whose flame crouched low in their sockets, he remained pure, an ascetic, master of his body, master of his burning heart. "*My soul was too strong to lead me into a trap; beneath the flowers I guessed that there was a precipice. . . . My fortune lay in my wisdom then; I might have forgotten myself for just one hour, but how many of my victories did not take longer than that!*"

Thus he was in love with love. Thus he raised the power which he exercised over himself to the point of forcing his love, even at the moment of its most terrible attacks, to recoil before a passion which, though less tyrannical, he felt to be permanent and for which, even when he was most cruelly tortured or when he had most completely abandoned himself to his love, he desired a victory which he had bought with his happiness. With Samson there was no question of abstaining from love, but of dominating love in the fiercest of encounters. He who aspires to compel all men to admire him and to obey him, will never compel them to do so unless he has multiplied his strength by hand-to-hand combat with love and by a victory over love. By that is the hero distinguished. Each time that he yields to love, the struggle begins. If he conquers, his heroism afterwards is the better fostered. His contemporaries, and more particularly posterity, only see the results of these victories of his. They do not perceive the blood which the victories have cost, especially when the blood flows silently from a great heart.

VIII

His Relations with Intellect

I

THERE is in all of us a central force, although most of us do not know how to use it. It is imperious, but when it is mastered, it creates the super-man, that is to say, the poet—whatever the poet's domain and language may be, whether he works in thought or whether he works in action. It exacts from him, whether he wills it or not, the same joys, the same ills, the same sacrifices and the same sternness towards himself—all identical reactions, though their object and their pretext may change. And it is this which distinguishes one poet from another and imposes upon their language the form under which it reaches us. This language is imposed upon the poet; it is the man himself. It is not he who chooses it. It is the aspect which the world, in contact with this tyrannical force, assumes in answer to his eager questioning. Thus fashion and taste and the ability which some men display for succeeding equally well, either by turns or simultaneously, in painting, literature, music, diplomacy, politics, commerce or industry, are the opposite of the poet's power, which is single, autonomous, irresistible, and which forces all other aptitudes to become constituent elements of this one, which is the master of them all. How many musicians have been bored by literature and how many authors has music put to flight! Was Pascal's greatness lessened because of his ideas of painting? If Napoleon had understood nothing about music or painting or letters, he would still have remained one of the greatest heroes of intellect. For heroism is of the intellectual order. What remains may be called valour, toughness of skin or of heart, and does not concern us here.

For the rest, we must be careful if we wish to appreciate Napoleon's tastes in this respect. He did not have the time to explain them himself, and when Las Cases or Gourgaud mention them I prefer not to attach too much importance to them, even though what they say may be acceptable to me. The general verdict is that he was highly cultured, and since neither Las Cases nor Gourgaud were so, they are not fitted to judge him in this respect. I would rather that notice should be taken of the whole of his conversation with Goethe, who contented himself with commenting, twice, upon the "perfect justice" of his observations. But even that is not enough for me. Goethe was flattered because *Werther* was the Master's favourite book. And, moreover, I distrust the period, which was sentimental and dogmatic in its tastes. It is better to keep to the facts. He read much and at random: not much history, however—but then of what account was historical writing up to his time, save only that of Montesquieu, whom he appreciated? He lacked the time to apply and to deepen his culture, which was extensive for that period. But he seemed to go straight, as though by instinct, to the great works. He did not care for contemporary productions—and was he so very wrong in that?—except those of Goethe and Chateaubriand, wherein he was by no means foolish. And, after all, he had many things to do besides reading and making comments upon novels.

He was full of ancient and Eastern thought; a fact which was perhaps the sign in him of an earlier discipline, dating from his youth, when, as an officer, he used to carry a Plutarch in his wallet. Yet he read with enthusiasm the Odyssey—an adventure on the seas—and the New Testament—an adventure amongst souls; and these were supplemented by the Thousand and One Nights and the *Itinerary from Paris to Jerusalem* in that imaginary journey whither he was led by his memories of the Mediterranean where he was born and where began the glory which he followed across the illustrious plains to the fantastic city of the Doges; the glory which, in order that he might better feel it in its very essence, he followed as far as the cradle whence sprang the glory common to mankind, from the Pyramids to Sinai. I would not necessarily see in that a literary inclination, if imagination, on the other hand, were not the sole source wherein action and thought are steeped, if his taste for Dante and Ossian, for *Werther*, for the *Génie du Christianism*,[1] did not confirm, in the bent of his mind, that irresistible desire to escape from the little worries, the little calculations and the little interests of the spirit, in order to busy himself in the dangerous mystery of his resolute passion to go on to the very end, even though it should consume him.

That, in reality, was what he was seeking; and for his purpose, apart from Rousseau and from Montesquieu, whom he described, with singular foresight, as "*the only writer from whom nothing could be subtracted*," and whom he doubtless recognized as the most definite originator of his own social and political ideas, the eighteenth century left him more or less indifferent. At a time when Voltaire was still reckoned as one of the great tragedians, he realized the latter's emptiness and stated that he understood "*neither men, things, nor great passions.*" Racine, on the other hand, attracted him; he read *Andromaque* and *Phèdre* and criticized them with the utmost eagerness. He respected Corneille, no doubt because he saw in him a part of the fundamental workings of his own political system, but he read very little of him. Was that because he perhaps found in Corneille that passion was overcome too early and that it was less easy to follow "*the progression of terror*" in his writings than in those of Æschylus? He half excused himself from commenting on the Greek tragedians, considering that their works were too much travestied, and demanding a return to literal translations with the choruses and accurate costumes. All of which, in short, was consistent enough, up to and including his love for music—that victorious recovery of man's talent for organization over the chaos of his passions. Tragedy is impassioned adventure ordained by the effort of an intelligent will-power. It would seem that he followed in his inner mind, as it were, in History and in the Drama, the working of those mute forces which determine them and which the Leader and the Poet confine themselves to organizing.

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[1] See Appendix. Note 19.

Moreover, when he did not know or did not feel, he admitted the fact. In Italy, when a choice of pictures and statues had to be made, he delegated the task to members of the Institute. That may seem to us to-day a very quaint idea, and in any case a particularly naïve one; but it was quite in accord with his usual custom when confronted with matters outside the sphere of his own genius, a custom which he made an important item in his system in order that there should be no gap in it. He appears to have been almost indifferent to the plastic arts, wherein the system was also employed; the system which David imposed upon him after having saddled the whole revolution with it in a more or less ridiculous way. But that did not prevent David from being a great painter or prevent Napoleon from finding in it, no doubt, that too settled management and those too categorical side-views which proved so useful to him in the positive domain of Administration and Law. For the rest, he was a connoisseur in men; he fled from or despised a fool, but intelligence and strength attracted him, and it was not difficult for him, far removed though he might have felt himself to be from the spirit of painting, to recognize in their conversation, their tones, in their silences even, the superiority of certain artists over others. It is to be noted that, after David, Prud'hon and Gros were his favourite artists.

2

It was among men of thought that he looked for and found his friends. It is a very remarkable fact that, apart from Desaix, who seems to have been of his own race and in whom he discovered "*an antique character*" (something which he himself might have wished to be), there was not a single man amongst his officers who was close to his heart. He liked Lannes, no doubt, and Duroc and Bertrand. But his regard for the latter was the regard he might have had for some familiar splendid object—a statue or a picture: to him Bertrand was the most accomplished specimen of those magnificent leaders who, starting barefoot from some village in the Vosges or the Pyrhenees, achieved their rank by virtue of the number of their exploits and their wounds. They commanded armies at thirty and were freaks of sheer strength and joyful energy. They were young, single-minded, shy in spite of their gold lace, tall and slim; they clamoured for the most terrible responsibility with fiery hearts and calm spirits. They were drunk with war, hungry for glory and death. He regarded them as useful house-dogs who kept a good watch and bit hard.

His friends, if he had any, were Monge and Laplace, men with keen, musical minds, pursuing in the silent poetry of mathematics those inflexible co-ordinates which led them to build up the *Géométrie Descriptive* and the *Système du Monde,* just as they led Napoleon's imagination to grasp, in the converging lines of the movements of his armies and of his political schemes, the form of the supreme victory which was destined always to escape him and of the spiritual edifice which he was never to finish. There was Berthollet, whose character and courage drove him to make public recantation of his mistakes in science, and who, like Napoleon himself, was in the habit of drawing abstract deductions from the most material and directly observed objects. There was Cabanis, with his pure imperious mind, with whom he shared a common horror of dogmatic idealism. In this latter both Cabanis, with an intelligence educated by biology, and Napoleon, with a living genius nourished on its own substance, saw an evil with which their sensual strength could not endure contact. It would appear that such illustrious friendships, added to what we know of his tastes, his reading, and his encounter with Goethe, are enough to disprove that hatred of ideas which he is accused of entertaining.

What he hated was the theorist. We are wrong about the meaning of that word, wilfully more often than not, I think. It would be better to use another—phraseologist, for instance—which lends itself less to ambiguity. When Napoleon came on the scene, thought seemed dead in France. The Academies and Salons and Assemblies were crowded with extravagant caricatures of the ideas and the men of the great century which was ending. The Greeks and Romans, the *Contrat Social*, the *Esprit des Lois*, the *Dictionnaire Philosophique*, entangled these cardboard heroes and their oft-repeated formulæ in an emphatic flood of lampoons and platform oratory which the scum of the Press and the Committee passed on from mouth to mouth to the accompaniment of applause from the helots of Liberty. To realize the physical horror, as it were, with which these men could inspire him, one must know what they represented, these social and political metaphysicians, these club philosophers, builders of definitive happiness and of constitutions in space, who would have thought themselves dishonoured if they had not donned a toga to speak—pretentious fools, sinister babblers, the teeming vermin of the charnel-house and the tribunal; and then contrast them with Napoleon's clear mind, carving its way straight ahead, with his powerful imagination loving only what was complete and seeing things only as a whole. They were silent, however, as soon as he made his gesture and turned their attention to embroidering keys on the tails of their coats. The less wise among them started on the tack of fitting their dusty maxims into bombastic verse or of wheezing out their dull harangues among the draughts of the Institute. "*Good Lord! How foolish men of letters are!*"

In very truth.

3

It is asserted—by M. Thiers, I think—that in the course of one of his conversations with Goethe, Napoleon said something like this: "*I do not understand why a man like you dis-*

likes a clipped style." It was the expression of a Latin aristocrat and a logician, of the constructor of the Codes, the maker of roads and bridges. It was an expression quite in accord with the structure of a mind which could not admit that there need be any interval between conception and realization except that requisite for the giving of an order. The expression of a leader, assigning every man to his place according to a predetermined rôle. "*He was a great colourist,*" he said of Tacitus, "*but not an historian.*" For he misunderstood nobody—on condition, first of all, that nobody misunderstood him. For him, no confusionism. Though his poem might recede further day by day into the imaginary perspective which his rapid march opened up before him at every step he took, all the materials for his poem were prescribed within himself, rigorously, each according to his plan, each in its place. The architecture of his intellect is perceptible, and even measurable, in all his outward actions. He was a Roman, a builder, driving canals and roads in all directions to prepare, in the rich disorder of the earth, clean, plain paths along which men's minds could move. He razed the old quarters of cities to the ground or drove straight avenues through them. He erected fountains which were fed by aqueducts. He tunnelled through mountains. He filled up ravines. He embanked rivers. He drained marshes. His regulations for roads and bridges were drawn up with the object of preserving them. He would suffer no man to talk to him of iron—which rusts and is eaten away. Stone only would he recognize. He desired to prolong in time the space which he could measure with his eyes and on which he could impose the mark of his will-power. He fixed a time-limit for work which he had ordered to be done: it was begun at the moment he stipulated and at the end of that time-limit it was finished. His own needs were transformed on the spot into projects of public utility. If he had to wait on the bank of a river for a boat which was late in coming, he would decide to have a bridge built there—and the bridge was built. The world was organized in his mind with a fixedness of profile and contour such that his views in every department assumed an aspect of monumental severity directly and immediately due to his action.

It was for this reason that his thoughts were ferociously clear, with sharp edges, and silent, naked outlines; they were carved, as it were, from a great block, falling cleanly and heavily where he wished them to fall. I admit that I do not care for those much-praised proclamations of his in which, in order to gain the ears of his soldiers, he forces himself to speak not in his own language, but in that which is expedient; in which he is but seldom himself, repeats his own phrases, dissimulates, moreover, and sounds hollow. But sometimes his correspondence, always so clear and so swift, hard and cutting like a broadsword, and especially some of his conversations and speeches which have been preserved, have so noble a turn that they achieve a miracle ; and that precisely because by their form they are definitely "eloquence"—of the firmest and barest type, presenting alternately with brusque turns of phrase and stirring surprises, the picturesque and highly coloured animation of an epic tale of adventure, the profound, continuous movement of lyrical expansion, the poignant contrasts of exalted tragedy. "Granite heated in a volcano," said one of his Brienne professors. He was indeed that—with life in addition. He wrote and dictated and spoke as though he was. One might say that the pride in his character sustained his words at their height, that it kept him, when he so chose, above common phraseology, or, at the selected moment and place, precipitated him like a stone into his speech. The energy of his thought dominated his sentences and led them on to a transport that was giddy and yet firm, and that panted from its own brusque digressions. Short-lived but oft-repeated flashes lit up the abysses, where, thanks to some concrete word, familiar or even trivial, introduced into some grand metaphor, the picturesque reality of a splendid scene would appear, suddenly revealing the man himself, disgusted, or sarcastic, or unfortunate, disarmed, or even a quite human person under his mighty god-like wings.

There is no question, surely, of entrusting the command of armies or the government of peoples to artists. There would be a risk of their dreaming of the ode they wished to write or the picture they wished to paint at the precise moment when they were required to act. But it has so happened that peoples have never been really governed or armies commanded except by poets of action possessing the strength and the lyrical intuition necessary to manipulate the sentiments and the needs of multitudes with the same sure inspiration with which one man will group his words and another his colours. And, as realists, let us note this. Napoleon differs from Shakespeare, or Michelangelo or Rembrandt, or Balzac, only in the quality peculiar to the medium of his art. Like they, he imagined a second reality which he created with the most vital objects of the more direct reality. Like they, he did not select these objects. They were imposed upon him. And it was not his fault if the force which was his tyrant demanded, for his liberation, that these objects should be men and the passions of men—their bodies, often enough. He obeyed. To build his monument he took the materials which God himself assigned to him.

IX

The Clay

I

WHEN he assumed supreme command, Napoleon had what was probably the finest army that had ever existed; for never before had an army been founded and forged in such circumstances. For the past ten years it had been waging war on every frontier. Beaten at first and wandering about like a flock without a shepherd, wretched but becoming enlightened in spirit, it had gradually improved itself through the brutal experience of active service; its bad elements had been eliminated by the chance of the battlefield or by the virtue of the guillotine, and at the same time its more enduring elements had been tempered by poverty, ambition, faith, courage, sacrifice and fear. The army had come to recognize its masters—the men who had marched bootless and ragged in its ranks, who had known hunger, cold, unemployment, wretchedness and all the illusions of the soldier, men who had gathered to themselves its obscure and scattered strength, like so many hardy grains of corn, which, nourished by the juices of the soil, push their way up, through weeds and stones, straight towards the sky. Such and such a colonel of thirty-five had had as a soldier such and such an appointment at thirty; he had shared his loaf and his straw with a hundred men in his regiment whose hair was already grey. The same spirit began to imbue the army, welding its bones, stretching its muscles, setting its nerves on fire, balancing its qualities in necessary contrast, arranging its whole organism into stable organs, into dense and supple legions, born in battle, formed by battle, living in sight of battle, with every cell, impregnated with salt and iron, in the exact place which combat demanded. The same spirit, with the clash of interests and sentiments intensifying its energy under the goad of self-pride, harmonized the whole force and launched it towards the same objective. The adventurous passion of the army of Italy blended with the idealistic passion of the army of the Rhine, thus locking up individual jealousies and hatreds and collective virtues and vices within a living whole, with a common framework to maintain its quivering unity and a strong hand acting in obedience to a great mind to direct it on a smooth path.

The *Grande Armée* was an epitome of the nation in arms—from the Gaul of Brennus to the France of Richelieu. As always, a foreign war produced a tendency for common action, and, for a while at any rate, put an end to the internal convulsions by which its warlike talents were whetted and which, by their constant antagonism, maintained its profound desire for order, proportion and amity. Teutonic and Latin tribes, Celts and Normans, Francs and Albigenses, Armagnacs and Burgundians—they were all represented in the *Grande Armée.* The Gascon generals—Lannes, Bernadotte, Brune, Bessières, Soult, Lamarque, Clausel, Nansouty—for whom Mortier led the Flemish weavers, Augereau the Parisian shopkeepers, Suchet the silk-weavers from Lyons, Davout the metal-workers from the *Franche-Comté* and Burgundy, Cambronne the Breton rope-makers—provided imagination, astuteness, coolness under a sudden attack, the endurance of lank frames which a morsel of bread, a few figs and spring water could sustain in health; provided, too, the innate bent for pillage and marauding which raised jokes and shouts of joy when minarets and arches were to be seen pointing upwards on the horizon, the violent zest to dazzle and to make a show which was fostered by unusual adventures and which pursued them even to death itself. Murat, decked with diamonds and gold, and with plumes and feathers waving, rode with the advanced guard, his sword in his scabbard and using his riding-whip on the thin quarters of the Cossacks' horses, making them fly before his rustic oaths.

Behind Ney, advancing through the snow or the smoke with his fiery countenance, his terrible eyes and his hair as red and curly as flames, came the generals from Lorraine—Gouvion Saint-Cyr, Oudinot, Drouot, Mouton, Gérard, Lasalle, Exelmans—for whom Harispe and Barbanègre led the shepherds of the Pyrhenees and of the Landes, Montbrun and Victor the woodcutters of the Dauphiné and the Cevennes, Jourdan the masons of Limoges, Marbot and Daumesnil the Périgord quarrymen, Masséna and Reille the smugglers of Maures, the shade of Desaix the drovers of Auvergne—all of them giving to the common mill, obedience, sustained continuity and resolution in action, power to resist unforeseen events and panics, a massive, formidable strength in their pride of cementing men to men by means of their pitiless will-power, a kind of gloomy desire for death in their infatuation for a single idea with nothing to balance against it. The vine-dressers from the hillsides bordering the rivers, the husbandmen from the great plains, were the flesh round these axes and these centres; they were the vertebræ, the nerve cells, the soul and the heart of the *Grande Armée.* This flesh grew thick upon the soil, loving it passionately; it was austere and full-blooded because it lived in the wind and was tanned by it, lived upon the chestnuts which it knocked down from the trees and on the bread which it kneaded, became lively under the influence of its cider and its wine. A people, a peasant army, whose cool blood and cautious temperament was brought in contact with terrible ferments of collective idealism, of individual egotism, of instability in desires and means and methods, by a large capital—highly strung, fluctuating, impressionable. A disordered people and an army which would have been beaten, if some great peril and some great will-power had not imposed harmony and order upon them. A people and an army which would be harmonious in thought and victorious in action if the peril and the will-power appeared at some turning in their road. A people and an army which would have been ill-humoured, and unfaithful, vainglorious, blundering, discouraged, idle, in the instability of too prolonged an internal or external peace and of ill-directed desires. But good-humoured, faithful, simple, clever, heroic, ardent, in the stability of a decisive adventure and strong guidance therein. . . . Such was what they gave Napoleon, and such what he gave them in return.

Note that, for this to come to pass, it was necessary for the whole people to be in arms, with districts, trades and classes all mingled together. It was necessary for its leader to make conscription a normal and permanent instrument, to think out a system of reserves and thus to pave the way for war to become organic, instead of sporadic as it had formerly been. And from that, by plunging the very roots of the people into it, by perpetuating the idea of the Revolution in making it a collective means by which they could propagate their ideas, their needs, their aspirations, their spiritual imperialism, it was necessary that he should unite them so strongly with war that it would no longer be separable from their essential destinies; and that, thanks to him, they would be reduced either to a passionate desire to suppress it for ever—which is perhaps the surest way of perpetuating it—or to the obligation to obtain from it, on every occasion when they were compelled to have recourse to it, the maximum of such terrible benefits as can be gained from its drama when every heart, every mind, every body, is brought to bay in enduring it.

2

What did Napoleon think of the French people, "the poet among the nations,"[1] of this giant cello, whose strings are so often broken, or so often break themselves, because they stretch themselves too tight, this box of harmony quivering in response to every passing breeze, sensitive to any hand that comes near it, trembling, and only waiting for a powerful bow to unite all its wandering sounds in the broad, full wave of a decisive melody? "He loved France passionately," Bourrienne tells us. But did Bourrienne grasp the motives and the meaning behind that love? When Taine wrote that Napoleon loved France "as a rider loves his horse," does he not seem nearer the mark? But is he not speaking like a professor—objectively, rather haughtily and stiffly, and malevolently? And then is it very easy to know the feelings of a horse, and is not France better than, or in any case different from, a horse? On the other hand, does not Napoleon's own saying, "*I have only one passion, and one mistress—France: I sleep with her; she has never failed me . . .*" bring us much nearer to understanding the nature of the affection which he bore towards her? He on one side, she on the other. Through each other they experienced the intoxication which separately neither of them would have known, which no man, at any time, had given to France and which France alone was capable of giving in return. I do not know if the word "patriotism" is suitable to define this feeling of his. I scarcely think so, to tell the truth. But since it was more individual, more rare, and certainly less disinterested, I ask myself whether it was not also much vaster and whether it did not comprise, in its dramatic violence, a poetic and even a positive fruitfulness which is lacking in patriotism. There is eternal discussion on the respective merits of marriage and love. They are two different things, the one assuring the conservation of the species, the other its lyrical expansion ; in the one the social virtues are consolidated, but from the other is born art. It is not the fault of the citizen if he does not play the same part in the human drama as does the artist. And *vice versa*.

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[1] Elizabeth Browning.

In any case, Napoleon saw that well enough, and said so plainly enough. His feelings and those of France were like those of the love-passion. They quarrelled and railed at each other. He lashed her and made her bleed, he adorned and beautified her, made her drunk with the smell of gunpowder and with glory ; she infatuated him with pride, gave him transports of joy, used her sensitive power to the highest point of exaltation ; she bit him, she wept, she cried with pleasure and with pain and in the end, exhausted after the most wonderful and the maddest of their embraces, she threw him downstairs. Let him but knock at the door and she would open it, sobbing wildly ; and after they had taken him from her arms, her eyes, staring from her poor pale face, were for ever fixed upon her wonderful memories, which sometimes she conjured up and sometimes she forced herself to forget by means of fiery words, or fierce orgies of music and painting, or in the silent frenzy of sentimental despair. Thus there came a day when, in the loneliness of her grief, and because of the hollow phrases with which it was sought to soothe her, she lent herself to the flabby caresses of a man who had pasted cardboard over his moustache and decked out his curls with coloured paper so that she might mistake him for Napoleon himself. . . .[1]

I am aware that there were defaulters and that his terrible decrees were sometimes greeted with the rumble of revolt: when, for instance, after the tortures of thirst on the ill-omened plains of Castile, where worse tortures still awaited the stragglers who were captured by the guerillas behind the army, men had to recross the mountains and traverse the whole of Europe on foot in order to die in the snow, with broken bones, with vermin in their wounds, with hunger in their stomachs, with ice in their hearts and with gangrene in their blood. I am aware that from 1809 onwards, or in any case from 1812, following upon the delirious love which the Italian campaign, *Brumaire*, the Consulate and Austerlitz had won for him, he was hated in his absence—even by the soldiers, even by his conscripts. Yet if he appeared on the scene, the army and the people would greet him with an impassioned outburst of enthusiasm. There were acclamations for him on the eve of victories or when he appeared on the battlefield. There was that prolonged shout of affection which carried him on its deep-sounding wave from the gulf of Juan to Paris. There was the strange delirium of men advancing to the massacre of the battlefield who would wave their arms not because they wanted to kill but because they wanted to glorify the man who was sending them thither. A divine phenomenon, doubtless, which made men feel at such moments that this one man was the irresponsible instrument of a vast, unknown, supernatural design which surrounded them, passed beyond them, raised them above the banal fate which, but for him, awaited them. When Rembrandt was painting, alone and in semi-darkness, all the coloured molecules which were wandering unguided in an indefinite compass were precipitated in the service of his skill, and in obedience to the least of his gestures grouped themselves according to his law. . . . Thus, too, these human molecules felt that in the footsteps of the Archangel of War there trailed perhaps the phantoms of universal order and unity, and that these might be brought to light in some distant future.

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[1] i.e. Napoleon III.—*Translator's note.*

Love, I would repeat, with its futile revolts and its delirious slavery! Be sure that he felt it only too well.

"*What will people say when I die?*"

"Sire, they will say: 'The world has lost the greatest of men.'"

" Sire, they will say : ' The peoples have lost their father.' "

" Sire, they will say : ' The earth's axis has shifted.' "

" *You are quite wrong, gentlemen. People will say ' Ouf ! '* "

People will say " Ouf ! "—as one says it when after having climbed a mountain supposed to be unscaleable, and, burning with fever and thirst, bitten by snakes, torn by brambles, covered with sweat and dust, broken with pride and with weariness, one throws oneself down on some slate-coloured rock to await the freshness and the holiness of night. People will say " Ouf ! "—as one says it when after having crossed a poisonous marsh, swarming with alligators, one sees, on arriving at the farther side, the golden apples of the Hesperides. People will say " Ouf ! "—as one says it when escaping from Circe's terrible arms, one realizes that her perfume is growing fainter in one's nostrils and one sees children and animals playing by the bank of a stream. Love, plunging its bloody dagger deep into the flesh of man, opens up the sources of the spirit.

People will say " Ouf ! " Has not man, in the paroxysm of love, wished a thousand times for the death of his mistress, so that his flesh may be delivered from the garment which is burning him, so that he may regain his freedom. Napoleon produced, simultaneously or in turn, and often in the same persons, enthusiasm and hatred, delirious joy and suffering. Such is the lot of omnipotent men. No one could be indifferent to him. He stirred all hearts and all minds : every latent force was roused during his progress. The peoples hoped for his death, but they desired him to be victorious. The inhabitants of Elba burnt him in effigy a few days before his arrival there, but as soon as he had come they were overwhelmed with joy. Wherever he went—Milan, Amsterdam, Vienna, Dresden, Berlin, Warsaw, even in a hostile country, even in captured towns, people massed in his path to welcome him. When he was defeated and arrived as a prisoner on board the *Bellerophon* in Plymouth Roads, to be henceforth alone in his glory, the sea was so thick with ships, rowing-boats and barges that they were touching each other, and if he appeared on the bridge, all heads were bared in a fervent silence. "Mankind submitted to this man as to the phenomena of Nature."[1]

It is a strange fact that not merely the enemy, but those who actually hated him personally yielded to his fascination. Cheap popularity had nothing to do with that. "*I was the sun describing its ecliptic and crossing the equator. As I arrived in each climate, every hope was roused ; people blessed and adored me. But as I passed on, as people ceased to understand me,*

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[1] Emerson.

there came then feelings of the opposite kind." He was the long-awaited being whom all men accepted even if they suffered because of him. All men—from the roughest and the most kind-hearted to the humblest, to the most haughty. During the crossing from Egypt to France, one of his companions made this assertion : " There is not one of us who would not throw himself overboard, if to do so would be of any use to him. But to serve his purpose we would all of us do so before he even suggested it." Decrès, who had known him in Paris, went to see him as he was passing through Toulon, a few days after he had been appointed commander-in-chief of the Army of Italy, but before he had any victory to his credit. " I hurried up to him," he recounts, " full of eagerness and joy. . . . I was about to throw myself at him, but his attitude, his look, the sound of his voice, were enough to pull me up short. There was, however, nothing offensive about his behaviour, but it was enough : from that time onwards I never tried to bridge the gap which had been placed between us." And when he took over command, having as his subordinates superb old soldiers like Masséna, Serrurier, Laharpe, who had seen more service than he had, who had already won victories and already commanded armies, and who observed with contempt and derision the strange chief that had been sent to them—a puny, unhealthy-looking figure, with his long unpowdered hair, his bilious complexion, his itch and his Corsican jargon—it was Augereau who said: "This little devil of a general frightens me." Vandamme, a typical soldier from the North, inflexible, wrinkled and coarse, made the same admission. And Goethe, when he was questioned as to the reasons for this strange fascination, answered simply: "It was *he* and one looked at him because it was he—that was all." Is that saying enough? Are there ever many men in the world who are capable of sacrificing the world in order to fulfil themselves and for whose sake the world consents to sacrifice itself? And is it necessary, in this connection, to evoke Whitman's words: "Everything waits, everything goes by default, until a strong personality appears . . ."

There is a mysterious intimacy of thought—profound and continuous, even at a distance—between the mistress and her lover, between mankind and the men marked down by God for some action the true direction and the future repercussions of which God Himself does not know. It would not inspire this love, nor this terror, nor this invincible ascendancy if it were not itself urged forward by the attraction of those secret forces within the masses which are led on by it and overwhelmed by it and which await its coming to make their effort. His universal popularity, almost terrifying at first, made crowds rush after him. Flags and shawls were hung from balconies and flowers were thrown under his horse's blood-stained hoofs. If his presence in some town were announced in the evening, his street would be crammed with sightseers by nightfall. Later, in spite of brusque eclipses and sudden changes, his popularity reached such mad heights at times that by means of it alone, coupled always with his own personality, he only just failed to repel the whole of Europe though he was without guns, without rifles, and almost without troops; and there was an evening, after his return from exile—still with only his popularity on which to count—when he was almost torn in pieces by the boisterous welcome of his soldiers. This popularity produced in him a strange intoxication. He fled from it, however, as we have seen, but in order the better to taste it, just as one closes one's door upon every one when one's mistress is within. Of what import to him were shouts, fanfares, crowns, a fanatical rush to look at him, since he knew that there was present within him that incomparable strength which cradled him as a ship is rocked at sea, and which, at dramatic moments, never failed him. He loved the instinct of the crowd. It was his own. "*I am a man of the people. Popular sensibility responds to my own. . . .*" And it was enough for him to know that he was bound to the people by the impulses which he and they experienced in common.

I am aware that when someone once asked him which incident in his career had given him the greatest feeling of happiness he answered: *"The march from Cannes to Paris."* But on that occasion he was alone, penniless, and without one soldier—alone against a whole world in conspiracy to effect his removal, alone against all the material forces of a nation which was organized to bar his route: yet through the miraculous action of hearts which beat in answer to his own, he reconquered his empire without bloodshed. An unexpected revenge, sufficing to wash away the sins of a great spirit who, in order to realize the visions which the world expected of him, had had to destroy so many, many lives, with the world's delirious consent or in spite of its revolt against him—suppressed though it always was by a single glance from him: an unexpected revenge of invincible purity. And how much better, with this phrase of his in mind, does one understand, in all its noble innocence, that other answer which he gave to Roederer when the latter recounted to him some kindly remarks about him made by his brother Joseph: *"I in no way accept the favour he does me of being the only one to love me. I want to have five hundred million men as my friends."*

3

It is characteristic of love that if it is to endure and to deepen it demands unceasing mutual sacrifices; and Napoleon's love was of such a quality that the sacrifices demanded by it, though they may not have frightened him, went each day a little farther beyond the peoples' capacity for energy and imagination. And the peoples, whatever one may say or believe about them, were much more egoistic than he was. The Revolution, though defeated, had accomplished its mission and had buried its roots so deeply in France and in Europe that they could not now be torn up; and so men disentangled themselves from a passion which they no longer shared because, to ordinary imaginations and energies, it had already yielded all its fruits, and imprisoned him over whom it tyrannized in a narrow cage where it quickly consumed him to his very bones. "*I am oppressed because I come from the people.*" The peoples, exhausted by his fierce embraces, handed over to their masters the task of overthrowing him. But he had injected into the peoples the seed of the times to come.

Time was needed. Much more time will still be needed. For a great deed has no ending. It is so wide and deep that it can even create forms which seem to contradict it entirely. Napoleon, like everything which exists, was no more than transient. But he was the most significant personality, I think, since Christ.

It is curious that nineteenth-century protagonists of the French Revolution are almost all bent on regarding the man who reorganized it in France so that he might project it into Europe, as its destroyer : Michelet, for instance, who was so hostile to the mere letter and for whom only the spirit counted. The sword, the sceptre, the crown, the nobility—all these have created an illusion. The word " Republic " is preferred to the fact " Democracy." The label masked the deep-set powers which were rising from within the peoples and which expanded the heart of this man in order that he might force the world to break with the Middle Ages whose admirable organization now survived only in outward forms and empty formulæ, and in order that he might be prepared to seek the elements of a new organism in the individualistic rhythms revealed by the Renaissance. Because he sat upon the throne of Saint Louis and because, in the course of one of his war-like expeditions, he carried off the daughter of Barberousse, it was forgotten that civil equality and freedom of religious opinion were forcibly imposed upon all men and that the Inquisition was put underground ; that serfdom was abolished wherever his armies went, and that by an exact and complete reversal of values hitherto sacrosanct, peasants were installed on every throne and princesses given to them as bed-fellows. No one realized the spiritual character of an imperialism resembling that of Cæsar, or of Saint Paul, or of Luther: an imperialism with aspirations to subject the West to one simple idea (accepted in principle by all conscientious men and by every popular impulse) in order to expand it and to impose it, by means of the West, on Europe first of all and later, perhaps, on the whole world. He was the only man, at that moment, to represent in his dual rôle of leader of the people and leader of the army (a position achieved by him alone) that great desire for international unity which the Jews had made the Greeks accept, which the Church had inherited from Rome, and which the Revolution was snatching from the domain of theology—ruining the hierarchy which preserved it there—in order to instal it in the political domain under the pretension of renouncing every kind of hierarchy. It was not Napoleon's fault that the hierarchy which he tried to establish in order to inaugurate universal democracy did not respond to needs and demands which even now are hardly defined, and which were to be modified and complicated, destroyed in certain respects and immensely enhanced in others, by a formidable and mundane industrialism, impossible to foresee. He abolished one world—and that for ever. Those who believe, as he did, that man's imagination is great enough to create another, know that his effort in that direction has not been wasted. I am referring to an effort which had visible aims. For, as regards any others, he is immortal.

On 18th Brumaire he saved the Revolution, which seemed doomed not only by the facts of the situation but also in men's hearts, and by doing so he substituted for certainties which though ardent were obscure in their directions and their aims a will-power which was enlightened and continuous in its means. And whereas before his time it was the means which appeared impulsive and fragmentary, in his case it was the aims which seemed to become so. In that he was in agreement with the indifferent organization of the world whose means are rigorous and whose aims uncertain, because although it is aware of the mechanism destined to preserve Life it does not know whither Life is going.

"*I am the Revolution.*" No doubt, but what was the Revolution ? Whatever its ends might have been it was at that moment the spirit of life : it was that which, under cover of the moral or political pretexts which men demand in order to change the rhythm of their steps, prefers the formidable unknown to mortal stagnation, and prefers to march forth into the storm rather than to remain at ease at home. What gave him his strength, then, was that he was able to possess himself of that spirit. Whatever his pretexts of warlike imperialism may have been, if he went in the direction of his age he was justified. In spite of everything, under grape-shot and in snow, even when he was crushing the peoples at the same time as he was breaking the old framework in which it was hoped to keep them, his own imperialism embodied and signified the new hope of mankind—an illusion still perhaps, but for that very reason a force, and the force exactly corresponding to the century at the head of which he was marching. *"I shall be the Brutus of kings and the Cæsar of the Republic."* It was he, so the peoples felt, who brought the idol of Liberty with him in the ammunition wagons of his clattering batteries. It was he who was the conductor of the gigantic symphony which they did not understand perhaps, but which gave the necessary hope to their courage, just as their enthusiasm or their revolt was necessary to his faith. A new fact was produced in the history of the world. It was no longer a question of struggles between parties as in Athens, of struggles between classes as in Rome, or between dynasties and feudal lords and the Church as during the course of the Christian era: it was a question, rather, as at the time of the Crusades, of a fateful crisis in collective idealism, which, for the first time in the lifetime of men, was incarnate in a man worthy to impose it upon all men.

Let no one talk to me of the comedy of it.

He engraved the Law upon tablets so that it should endure after he was gone. Let no one speak of a necessity stronger than himself which he accepted only grudgingly. It made his masculine heart beat: it fired him. "*Democracy can be furious, but it has bowels: one can stir it. As for aristocracy, it always remains cold, and it never forgives.*" Let no one speak of the years when he seemed to be subordinating to his personal destiny the ideas which he had brought to the Empire and which the Empire concealed as a scabbard conceals its blade. Distant peoples were not deceived by that, and though the oppressed uttered shouts of hatred and rebellion, that was only because a child cannot be born without a flow of blood and the tearing of muscles. To kings he was always the incarnation of an idea, and although that idea was obscured from the peoples in 1809 under the blaze of his personal power, yet he was even then, as in 1796, as in 1814, the soldier of Liberty. And perhaps he was the only soldier who ever had Liberty because he did not content himself with defending it with words and formulæ and passive institutions, but made it an active, coherent, organized force as imperious as life, a force which was to impose itself, as the spring-board and the spring of the modern world, even on those who did not desire it.

X

His Mission

I

HIS apparent mistake was that, in order to realize civil liberty and impose upon the peoples the need and the taste for political liberty, he forged a framework so rigid that it strained at several points the equality which served as his foundation, and, while allowing liberty to hold good from the legal point of view, stifled its living vigour. This was no doubt necessary in order to graft the principle of liberty on to the habits of reasoning and endeavouring of Western societies and to incorporate the realizable minimum of it in the organism about to be created. "*I do not in the least hate liberty,*" he said in the course of an excellent conversation which he had with Benjamin Constant . . . "*I do not hate liberty. I pushed it out of my way when it obstructed my path; but I understand it. I was brought up on thoughts of it.*"[1] But for him, perhaps, none of the work of the Legislative Assembly and of the Convention would have survived the anarchy of the Directory, and those who cursed him for having seized power from the theorists of the Assembly in order firmly to unite in social reality the remnants of institutions and laws which they were quarrelling over like dogs over a heap of entrails, might have cursed the theorists themselves for having ensured the return of the old order, which was infinitely more free then than it was fifteen years later, thanks to the fatigue and disgust in men's minds then, and for having opposed its retrograde order to the bloody disorders under which the Revolution was foundering. It is a characteristic of creative minds to melt down into a solid block by means of their passionate flame all the needs which up till their time have been separate and to provoke the selfish rage of those who, in the capacity of parasites, have been exploiting those needs, or who propose to return, failing the ability to satisfy them, to forms of art which disown them. In Napoleon's case, as in that of Rembrandt or Delacroix, no one failed to do so.

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[1] See Appendix Note 20.

He had to choose. That is the fact of the matter. And he had the strength to do so. For selfish and local despotisms which were enervating and splitting up his people he substituted without hesitation a central and disinterested dictatorship which unified it. Far from destroying legal order, he re-established the reign of Law. It was a severe one, obviously, but it was impartial. And though on the other hand one may take into account that when the Code was being discussed Cambacérès, the former terrorist, considered him to be too much in favour of liberal principles, it is still true that his institutions seemed too stiff, his regulations too militaristic, and his laws too hard on women and on those who possessed no property. But he had to forge a necessary link in the chain, he had to build on a foundation which eighteenth-century ideas had declared to be practically definitive—the power of the Third Estate. And the Third Estate was about to undertake the most comprehensive and vigorous positive inquiry in History, the economic conquest richest in virtualities, the most decisive definition of the individual as regards ends which to us, since nowadays we cannot grasp them, tend to become almost mystical. Our wishes are different now, and so we decline to understand those which he represented then. We do not realize that he perhaps foresaw what we now see and had the energy, which we have not, to put into a system which though too rigid to endure was nevertheless necessary for creation, all the realistic and fruitful part of the principles which he undertook to maintain and extend. His methods were strong, it is true, but they were harmonious in their continuity, their unity and their logic, even if only in comparison with the convulsive acts of the Terror. "*There is in France*," he used to say, "*too much central* *influence; I would like to see less power in Paris and more in each locality.*" His organization was on its feet in a few months. It was provisional, certainly, but perfectly adapted to the circumstances. He had to uphold it against all assaults for fifteen years. Neither Europe nor France gave him credit of being capable of imagining any other.

To my mind the key to his political poem is to be found in the three months when, recalled from exile by one of those miracles which are only seen in a people which does not believe in miracles, overwhelmed by misfortune, abandoned by the majority of his own friends, with all his princes in flight or ruminating in their castles, alone with the French people, he had imagination enough to force his pride to bow to circumstances, and, without recrimination or reproaches, to call to his side those who had been fighting against him or even insulting him the very day before, and to explain his views and justify his actions to them with majestic simplicity, in a tone which, though a little weary and disillusioned, was familiar, noble and expressive of the assurance that his listeners were worthy of him. In all the stories of great men I think there is nothing more moving than that noble and melancholy interview when the author of *Adolphe* glimpsed the reality of Napoleon's heart. That the whole world was not there, that evening, to hear him, makes one almost despair of God. Would the world have been able to listen, however ? Could it have believed him when he spoke of peace, of liberty ? When the realism of a great man who does not share the immediate illusions of a banal idealism declares itself ready to test the means which that idealism suggests to him, there is a hue and cry after him. "*They could not imagine,*" he said subsequently, "*that a man might have a spirit strong enough to change his character or to adapt himself to the force of circumstances.*"

Were they wrong ? What shall we ever know of that ? Was he not mistaken in himself ? What a drama !

"I will confine my actions to that which is in the spirit of the future, which I desire even as you do. Why will you not believe me ? I have suffered. I am sincere. . . . I want what you want. War ? It shall be the last, I swear it. Let me win it. Once more, only once more. Afterwards, in other spheres, I will prepare harmonies such as you do not expect."

"No. We know you. You *are* war. You are good for that only. A man does not reform himself. Liberty and peace were not made for you."

O Grief !

"I am a poet. I am the resurrection and the life. You judge my future by my past, by your own future, which, since you are you, can only be identical with your past. But my future is an irresistible force which springs endlessly from the depths of my mystery and can create new forms which neither you nor I suspect. . . ."

It was because he was defeated that his martyrdom was allowed. It was because they did not believe in him any longer.

Once again, were they wrong? It is precisely the depth of his mystery which condemns the great man to be such a perpetual enigma both to himself and to others that though he himself is heroic enough to explore its abysses, the others recoil from it and steal away from it as soon as they can. Pitiable people for whom the effort is painful and who, when the poet appears, talk of the blood which his chimeras have cost. Have cost them? Not at all. Have cost the innocence of those numberless crowds which, because the same mystery dwells in them too, are still always ready to follow the man who declares himself able to enlighten them.

2

I cannot now remember who it was who tells us that one day at Montmorency the First Consul stopped before Rousseau's grave and said, as though speaking to himself:

"*It might have been better for the happiness of France if this man had never existed.*"

"And why, Citizen Consul?"

"It was he who paved the way for the French Revolution."

"I should not have thought that it was for you to complain of the Revolution."

"Well, the future will disclose whether it would not have been better for the happiness of the world if neither Rousseau nor myself had ever existed."

That was his second look into the abyss, his uneasiness and his doubt as to the utility of his mission, the *cui bono?* of a man whose every step created drama, simply because he was himself, and who was asking himself whether, after all, in spite of the energy with which he set to work to build, in spite of the straight and simple ideas which determined his choice, in spite of the faith in the eternity of his work which seemed necessary so that he might lead it to good with so much rectitude—whether this was not a terrible game, and in the end a futile one, to which he was lending himself so ingenuously. It has been said of Napoleon that he was animated by the Jacobin spirit, that he was a sort of "Robespierre on horseback." But that again is, to my mind, false. A Jacobin would never have said that "*the system of government ought to be adapted to the genius of the nation and the circumstances of the moment.*"

The work of the Jacobin would have been identical everywhere—in China, in Arabia, in France, in Africa, in Germany, in India, in America, in England. He invented a world based on an *a priori* conception of man, a world whose every aspect was determined by man in the abstract, the same everywhere. The creator invents nothing. He takes the materials which present themselves and combines them according to his imagination. I do not think that Napoleon, if he had realized his first dream of conquering the East, would have organized it as he organized France. But he realized that he could only organize France in accordance with the Revolution, and with that end in view he made full use of all the means which would enable him to do so. The high scepticism which animates all artists warned him, certainly, that at his death his system would be bereft of its most outstanding virtue: which was one reason the more for indicating all its aspects and for establishing it on a broad and solid basis. He launched it into the future with the strength and breadth of view which were characteristic of him. And it might perhaps have lasted six centuries but for the immense influx of new methods and needs which inundated our minds during the hundred years which came after him. But that, be it noted, was because he was Napoleon. Michelangelo still reigns, still oppresses us, still corrupts us—because he was Michelangelo. It is typical of the great man to create oppressive forms even while he destroys the oppressive forms which existed before his time.

He did not like tyranny. And wherever he encountered it he broke it down. But his own tyranny intoxicated him, because an incomparable creative virtue was born out of the decisions which it took. "*At all times,*" he said, "*the first law of the State has been its security, the pledge of its security its strength, and the limit of of its strength that of the intelligence which has been its trustee.*" That is plain enough. So long as he was alive the Revolution would live and would proceed in the direction in which he impelled it. Because he saw no other direction. Because there was no other. Because he alone had been powerful enough to seize the Revolution when it was foundering, to pull it in to the bank and to hold it up by the collar with a strong hand. But wait. He had no illusions. To quote him once again: "*Do you know what I admire most in the world? The impotence of force to organize anything. . . . France will never tolerate government by the sword. Those who believe so are curiously mistaken. Fifty years of degradation would be needed to make it possible. France is too noble a country, and too intelligent, to submit to material power and to inaugurate the cult of force within her borders. . . . In the long run the sword is always beaten by the mind.*" [1]

Was that a change of mind? Was it remorse? For my part I scarcely think so. It is thus that the artist speaks when he is told that the form he is creating will be useful as a point of departure for future forms. What future, however? Of what account is one century, or ten? Or a hundred? Between Jesus and ourselves there is only half the time that there is between the Sphinx and Jesus, and the spirit of Jesus is being effaced. There is an immense melancholy in the depths of great souls, and their immense delirium is only an unceasing victory of their will over their own intuitions which set a limit to their power, even when they fix those limits far beyond their death. Why so much fuss? Why so much blood? And why so much activity? . . . "*It would have been better for the happiness of the world if neither Rousseau nor myself had ever existed.*" But yet is not happiness the death of the world? Had not Rousseau and Napoleon, coming after Moses, after Jesus, a mission which outstripped them, and which was, precisely, to upset this happiness, and so by every means which God granted them—indignation, love, paradox, war—to prevent men's hearts from being drawn down into deadening quicksands? And does not the melancholy of great souls come from their feeling that indignation, like paradox, and love, like war, are only means, equal before eternity, to obtain for the world an illusion which they themselves do not share? Greatness is perhaps in reality only a sublime contrast between the radical pessimism of a man who submits to such greatness as a chance component of his nature, and his invincible hope of determining the future.

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[1] See Appendix. Note 21.

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His doubts overcome and his choice made—to precipitate civil equality, the progressive development of political liberty which that entails, and religious liberty into the hard grooves of institutions destined to model History in accordance with the Revolution—there was no further question of discussing their opportuneness, their means and their form. The attitude of the realist towards political parties cannot differ from that which he adopts towards religion—and, after all, what is a party, if not a religion which is decaying, or shaping itself, or proving abortive ? . . . "*One has to administer for the masses,*" he said, "*without caring whether such and such a thing pleases Mr. This or Citizen That. . . . Superior men see things from an altitude and hence are above parties.*" [1]

Would one not think one was listening to a painter, whose picture was being criticized after its details have been grasped—one man finding it too lifeless, another weak in half-tones, another lacking in sentiment, another too stiff in its drawing, another badly composed, and yet another finding its subject too fine or too gross

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[1] See Appendix. Note 22.

—but he alone, who conceived it, seeing it as whole, with its mistakes and its weaknesses certainly, but nevertheless harmonious, logically constructed, responding in the main to the function which the moment, and the needs and the spirit of the moment, expected of him? He alone judging it freely—though he has been impelled by his very genius to conceive it as it is—not through the eyes of his interests, his passions, his affections, his personal rancour, but with the constructive intelligence of the man who knows how to tackle the most complex of problems in all its aspects at once—like an object to be taken from its thick matrix, fined down, carved and turned in the light so that it may become a centre seen by every one, felt by every one, in which every one can see the start and the finish of their actions—he alone would have to spend all his days and evenings at this work, sacrificing to it his comfort, his safety, his happiness and, in the end, his life. I know that there are party men, too, who sacrifice their well-being with a light heart, but it is a confused sentiment which inspires them —the sentiment of a slave, narrow, one-sided, fanatical, negative above all else, full of blind hatred, incapable of expressing in the erection of a building that it has something to build, bent upon showing by words alone that it is in the right, always and everywhere. "*The least free of men is the party man.*"

There are several ways of being outside parties—whether below them or above them. The former is that used by political leaders in the majority of modern democracies. It consists in following the party in power: the rights of such men—that is to say their abilities—give them no other alternative. The latter is infinitely rarer, and very different also, because it presupposes, in him who possesses it, a noble personality. There was the method of Louis XI, living in a period of savage passions amongst organizations so violent that assassination, the theft of a province and contempt for treaties, were common and admitted occurrences. It consisted in playing upon these passions so as to oppose the organizations to each other, as one uses pawns on a chessboard, with no question of conscience, and having in view the attainment of a realistic object by no matter what means. There was that of Cæsar, advancing gently but firmly towards his goal between two extreme parties of approximately equal power, obtaining sometimes from one and sometimes from the other concessions or support, balancing one against the other with an admirable understanding of their historical necessity and of the respective limits of their creative worth. There was that of Napoleon, who arrived at a moment when the enervation of parties, after their passionate excesses, had infected and was corrupting a whole nation, and who thereupon decided to disregard them, suppressing them on the strength of such disregard, and throwing them into the common mould of the common monument which he was about to erect. Of the three this last was the most difficult—in kind at all events. For Louis XI was a king, Cæsar belonged to the greatest family in Rome, whereas Napoleon, less than four years before he undertook the task, was nothing at all. It was the least lasting, too, because when the master had disappeared, the parties were resuscitated with their appetite and their ferocity enhanced by the fast which he had imposed upon them. It was the most fruitful because a great brain dominated them, a brain capable of filling their silence with personal harmonies which they could not deny. In any case it was that which demanded from a statesman strong enough in other respects not to have had to rely upon the Terror but only upon the law, which was, in truth, stern enough, the utmost justice and severity towards those who served him, the utmost courage, vigilance and continuity in his plans. "*More character is needed for administration than for war.*"

4

True! When one has peered into the depths of his thought, stated on the one hand the inner scepticism with which he envisaged his task, and on the other hand his resolution to accomplish it—whole, coherent, imposing—like an artist who knows well enough that time will eat away his work, but who yet prefers suffering, ruin, and death to the prospect of not creating it in its entirety, one is seized with a kind of terror in one's consideration of the brain-power and the energy which were required to reconcile in one single form so many contradictions and antagonistic interests. With a majestic monument but just brought down—completely brought down, moreover, with its *débris* scattered wide in blood and dust—to erect unaided another, as solid in appearance as one wherein fifteen centuries had gone to the placing and building and carving of every stone—History makes no mention of such a hazardous attempt. On the ruins of cities the Barbarian installed an ancient civilization which he brought from his own land with all its organism complete and substituted it by force for the civilization which he had overthrown. But here there is nothing comparable. "*Thrones are not repaired.*" It was a question of welding the future with the past, the West with the East, the North with the South, democracy with aristocracy, tradition with revolution, divine right with the rights of peoples. And—a fact which should be noted—with the object, at the moment certainly chimerical, not of resuscitating the dead, or even of embalming their mummies, but of making the rights of the peoples divine, of establishing the revolution as a tradition, of ennobling democracy, of hardening the nucleus of unification of the globe, and of regenerating the dying forces of the past in the fountainhead of the future. He had to throw an arch across the abyss, uniting one edge of it to the other, and then, suspended above it in the storm, quickly to cement its rough stones, whilst at the same time beating off with his lacerated hands the continuous attacks of birds of prey.

In reality he was re-tempering the incurable dream that had been Rome's, that dream which was the backbone of Western history and which kept it on its feet; he was re-tempering it in the virgin energy of a new mysticism of which, suddenly and with a profundity of decisive intuition, he perceived that the whole skeleton could be understood. He seized the opportunity of an unprecedented event to resume the Latin idea of Work and Passion. For the powerful but diffuse organization of the Teutonic monarchy, which was falling in ruins and which Henri IV, Richelieu and Colbert had attempted to patch up, he meant to substitute the strong Latin unity of an embryonic organization such as the eighteenth century demanded. On it he inflicted a form which, though too definite, was undoubtedly necessary for those who had seized political power if they were to accomplish their mission of rearranging the world in a material sense. He was a Latin, and he thought as a

Latin, that is to say as an architect. And it was only in France that he could find the soil, the materials and the workmen for his task.

In all history France has had no other function but that. For her it has always been a question of balancing in a personal form the genius of the Mediterranean races with that of the Teutonic races. It is not her fault that her geographical situation makes her the cross-roads of the peoples of the West. It is not her fault that, since the beginnings of history, the German tribes, bringing in their wake the hordes from the great Steppes which reach from the Vistula to the Amour, have unceasingly threatened her or actually crossed the Rhine to burn her towns and mow down her harvests to the rhythm of their hymns of war. It is not her fault that her Western coasts lie on the route of the Scandinavians in their descent to the Southern seas and overlook, like an offered prey, from the high cliffs of Brittany where the pirates who bear in their hearts the poetry of the waves and the stars are watching for the passage of fishing boats and ships of war. It is not her fault that from the corridors of the Pyrhenees from time immemorial there should pour out on to her plains Numidians, Carthaginians, Iberians, Arabs, in search of oases and flocks to seize and minarets to erect above the waters and the palms. It is not her fault that her Southern coasts constantly saw appearing from the direction of the rising sun the blue, green, red and orange sails beneath which Phœnician or Greek sailors watched the young girls grouped round the bathing places, meaning to capture them with violence, or to exchange them for dazzling carpets, glass-ware, or little images. It is not her fault that in the flow of legions descending upon the forests of Gaul or in the reflux of regiments descending upon the cities of Lombardy the high Alpine passes should let through manuscripts, paintings, statues, vessels of gold and silver. And it is her glory, in the tangled drama of resistance by the sword to military invasions and resistance by the mind to moral invasions, in fruitful defeats and in mutilated victories, to re-discover perpetually, in the civilization which is her own and which is cemented by her blood and tears, that intellectual capacity which welcomes all this clamour and storm and stress so that she may organize them harmoniously in her mind.

This almost continuous tragedy is her reason for existence, a condition probably necessary for her creative force. It is because of it that she acquires that spiritual balance which sustains her will-to-live and which she seems to lose as soon as the conflict dies down. Pulled this way and that without respite, by the influence of the North on one side, the romantic, musical pantheistic influence of the mystical-minded mobs created by Teutonic feudalism, on the other side by the influence of the South, the rationalist, architectural, individualistic influence of the republican cities which the Latin aristocracy had regulated as an hierarchy and defined as such, she yet did not cease to be subject to their antagonism in her political institutions and to realize their harmony in her art, in which, moreover, one of the two currents forming it was always dominant.

The spirit of the Mediterranean framed the commune and the cathedral, but so luxuriant was the blooming which Teutonic invasions, stabilized by the Francs, had prepared, that the mighty, confused clamour of trades and forests and hymns submerged the lines of the monument under its anonymous lyricism. Broken in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries by repeated descents into Italy and victorious returns thence, in the imagination of the soldiers and the products of their rapine, the equilibrium was re-established in that classic age in the course of which neither the agony of Pascal, nor the harmony of Racine, nor the analysis of Descartes, nor the morality of Corneille succeeded in hiding the dominant desire of Corneille, Descartes, Racine and Pascal to subordinate the sensuous genius of the North of Europe to the regular and symmetrical cadences of the South. The new rupture inflicted on the classic rhythm by the century which followed and which seemed, in its paradoxical effort, as represented by Watteau, Diderot, Rousseau and Montesquieu, to be seeking in the Teutonic spirit itself for arms with which to oppose Teutonic feudalism, culminated, with the Revolution, in the overthrow of the monarchy which represented it, and with Napoleon in an attempt to substitute for the Frankish dynasty a Latin one as guardian of a unified and legalized civilization against one which was feudal and theological. Whatever may have been, during this century of analysis, of the encyclopædia, of symphonic painting re-discovered in Flanders, the importance of the new share in the Celtic soul, of the spirit descended from rivers, from the seas, from misty forests, whatever may have been its persistence in the romanticism which was to follow, Napoleon inflicted on France for a century the obligation to rely upon a Latin architecture if she was to build solidly. The people of Rome were not mistaken when they consoled themselves in these words for the permanent humiliation which his pride inflicted on them: "After all, it is an Italian family which we are imposing upon the barbarians to govern them. . . ."

Hence, especially, the enigmatic character of this strange spirit, placed between two ages, between two worlds, and trying to organize, simply by virtue of a will as preordained as a birth, the flesh of one of these ages—or worlds—round the skeleton of the other. Hence the too confused enthusiasm, the too definite hatred with which his memory is received whenever it is evoked. This hero was a man, yet no one resigns himself to that. This atheist was a mystic, yet no one reconciles himself to that. This poet was a logician, yet no one admits that. This soldier was a jurist, yet no one will allow that. This democrat was an aristocrat, yet no one understands that. The last, first, and above all. The mediocre aristocrats of thought cannot forgive him for having thought as a democrat. The mediocre democrats of action cannot forgive him for having acted like an aristocrat. His presence humiliated thrones, because he had demonstrated the origin of thrones by seating himself upon the highest of them all. And though, in that, it aggrandized the peoples, it also humiliated all the improvised shepherds of the peoples by compelling their feebleness to hide itself under an assumed virtue. No man can explain Napoleon's actions, because he was the only man who had dared to act as he did. Always and in every circumstance he forced men to let him speak in order to show them, in deeds or in words as decisive as a masterpiece, all the contradictions of his miraculous destiny. "*I am a soldier, a child of the Revolution, springing from the bosom of the people. I will not suffer myself to be insulted as a king.*"

XI

His Apostleship

I

THIS Roman, who competed with the barbarians for the possession of Gaul, because he very well knew that Gaul was the centre of the destinies of the West, was haunted by the desire to bring about the reign of *Pax Romana* in the West—that peace which the Legions, established everywhere, once imposed by stamping out local quarrels, by maintaining law and order, and by protecting work. A tremendous dream, but perhaps a less unrealizable one than that of a sentimental peace by unanimous consent ; for such consent implies a fanatical and idealistic passion, which, in turn, engenders war as soon as the unanimity withers. A dream, nevertheless, which presupposes that virtue is preserved intact during the long life of the people which imposes it. But in any case it is one of the poles of the moral axis round which human societies revolve; force, intelligently used, and mystical gentleness, may aim at achieving mutual equilibrium, but their reactions on each other periodically produce war, revolution, and that continuous, fruitful drama which allows mankind to break the immobility of circumstances and repel death. A dream whose characteristic is that essential and intransigent passion which made Napoleon the very antithesis of Christ.

What haunted him, on his own admission, was "*the regeneration of Europe.*" "*The peoples,*" he said, "*must be saved in spite of themselves.*" He wanted universal peace and the abolition of all frontiers; but his enemies, who were lighting everywhere those sporadic fires which he desired to extinguish for ever, did not want that, did not even conceive it. And that peace might be extended he wanted the peoples to be happy; he wanted them to be governed by modern ideas and modern needs, to be pleased with the institutions which they had given themselves, or which he had given them. For he was convinced that it was his rôle to give them these institutions and that they expected him to do so. He had strange illusions. He thought that all Spaniards would be on his side if he brought them equality, to which, actually, they were quite indifferent. He thought that the Germans would welcome him as a saviour if he crushed feudalism—though in reality feudalism was dear to them. Better still, he thought that if he succeeded in capturing London and there proclaiming a Republic, the abolition of the House of Lords, the Sovereignty of the people and the Rights of Man, England would support him. The peoples were with him. He felt it, he knew it, he asserted it with a passionate insistence which was sometimes almost pathetic and which, like the commands of a Demiurge, seemed to order History to follow in his path.[1] "*I wanted to prepare for the fusion of the great European interests, in the same way as I had arranged that of our own parties at home . . . I was scarcely troubled by the transient mutterings of the peoples, because I was sure that the results would infallibly bring them over to me. . . . In such a way Europe might have soon become a single nation, and any man, wherever he travelled, might have felt that he was in his native country all the time. This amalgamation will come sooner or later by force of circumstances; the impulse is there and I believe that after my fall and the disappearance of my system no lasting equilibrium will be possible in Europe except through the amalgamation and confederation of the great nations.*"[2]

Do you still believe that this is the Jacobin illusion, following after the Catholic and preceding the Socialist illusions? But note, however, that each of these illusions has left, is leaving, or will leave, solid deposits behind the torrent which bears it along. Note also that he uses the word "interests" rather than "principles" or "rights." Note, moreover, that he recognizes only "*two peoples, the Eastern and the Western,*" which presupposes—and his attitude in Cairo and in Paris showed it—the antagonism between his practical conceptions and the theoretical conceptions of pure Jacobinism. The latter worked in the abstract, surrounding with ideas, as with a rampart, the facts which it despised, denying, with whatever latitude might be required, the existence of and the necessity for a made religion or a monarchy; whereas Napoleon started from facts and proceeded by degrees, hoping, it is true, to unite the West, but well aware that beyond that another mysticism held sway, of which his friend Alexander was the advanced guard and which formed the other element in the gigantic equilibrium that he hoped to impose upon the universe. Note that he realized the ethnical characteristics which differentiate the groupings of human society, since he wished to make "EACH OF THESE PEOPLES *a single and homogeneous nation.*" Lastly, note that whereever he went, even when he misconstrued the especial passion which distinguished each people over whom his passing left its bloody furrows—Spain, Italy, Germany, Poland, even Russia—he roused a more generalized passion which here broke down the Inquisition, which there prepared the abolition of serfdom, which elsewhere roused the impulse and the desire for a future political unity—dangerous, indeed, for

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[1] See Appendix. Note 23.
[2] See Appendix. Note 24.

France, eternally the martyr of the fruitful ideas which she sows, but indispensable for the organic constitution of the West, which was his dream. His action, like that of water into which a stone is cast, extended in concentric circles. Like all powerful deeds, his deeds outstripped their ends—or at all events their visible ends. His expedition to Egypt woke Africa and the East. When he drove the Braganzas away across the sea, the sword-blade which was thereby born was destined to fight against America. Up to 1808 the entire world regarded him as the armed herald of the new era which the Revolution had opened up. And observe that he realized that well enough. "*I am making trial of my strength against Europe,*" he wrote one day to Fiévée. "*You are pitting yours against the spirit of the Revolution. Your ambition is greater than mine, but I have more chance of success than you.*"

2

His means were war, let it be admitted. But can one be sure that, in the circumstances, there were any others? He liked war, admitted also, because he was endowed for it as no other man ever was. But can one be sure that he did not almost always possess the strength to stop it at the moment when he judged that it had completely served its purpose? And did he not condemn it in principle, just as those great artists who know themselves to be superior to their material and who see in that material their supreme servitude are like eagles drunk with the deserts of space hovering with outstretched wings but yet forced to come whirling to earth to nourish themselves for their flight? "*War is an anachronism. . . . He who wants to disturb the peace of Europe, wants to provoke civil war.*" It was his enemies who desired war, not he. He believed so, anyway; and since a passion greater than theirs and also demanding war raised him above their narrow views and their petty interests, he forestalled them and provoked war so as not to be surprised. He forestalled them in starting war as, in war itself, he forestalled them in beginning hostilities.

It happened thus nearly always—in his two wars with Austria, in his war with Prussia, in his first and perhaps in his second war with Russia. When he suspected that his enemy was collecting himself, bracing his muscles, sharpening his claws and his teeth, he sprang and seized him by the throat. He attacked, without asking himself whether he could avoid attacking, whether he could restrain himself, temporize or agree to concessions—all of which were measures which would have upset his system and would, moreover, have wounded his pride. He pursued Illusion with a terrible candour, like the poet or the just man who sow death around them, precisely because they do not perceive the snares on the road and because their eyes are fixed on the harmony of numbers and lines or on the happiness of the human race. "*This war must be the last,*" he said in 1806. And it was he alone who, at Campo-Formio, at Amiens, at Presburg, in the bloody anarchy in which Europe was floundering, had the strength of mind to decide that an end must be put to the drama and to provide by his brain and energy the means to end it. He was the only man for whom war was a monumental task, envisaged as a whole, and consisting not in winning a battle but in developing a vast political poem with complex connections and universal echoes, springing from his very heart, pursued by him and brought to a perfect conclusion in a state of continuous delirium of creative imagination in which new realities and new dreams were born.

In reality there were only two wars between 1792 and 1815: the war in defence of the Revolution, which enabled the latter, under the terrible tension of quivering nerves, of torn muscles and of broken bones, to assert against Europe and against its very self, political and moral realities which were justified by its dramatic birth and which the peace of Amiens, in recognizing the Revolution, ended; and the war to expand the Revolution which, by carrying the Terror beyond the boundaries of France, spread those realities over Europe, the war which Bonaparte started in 1796, during the defensive period and which he pursued up to the day when, having exhausted all its logical consequences, and having reached Madrid, Vienna, Rome, Berlin, and Moscow, it finally died of excess in its last child-birth. All the subsidiary conflicts which flared up or died down during the course of these two wars were no more than episodes in that quarter of a century's struggle in which continental feudalism was ranged against embryonic French democracy and in which, especially, English oligarchy faced the economic competition which the power of France threatened to bring against it.

When all her allies had been beaten in turn and were disarming, or pretending to disarm, England undertook and prolonged a war which had as its real aim the ruin of France on the continent, and which produced a new enemy as soon as the previous one succumbed. A mighty struggle! Napoleon went all over Europe to come to grips with England, but she always eluded him. As he could only strike at her on land, he pursued her as far as Moscow, with the idea of using Moscow as a base in order to follow her to India. He denied her the continent, closed its roadsteads and its rivers to her, drove her to the ports of Portugal and Spain, confined her to the sea as though in a gaol and in doing so devised, perhaps, the most efficacious form of future struggles. From outside the furnace where men were being melted away, she watched them die. One gold piece for a soldier, a sack of gold for a regiment, a ton of gold for a nation. A great thing, truly, for terrific energy was needed for that: she had to tighten her belt and cover the seas with vigilant frigates; she had to endure the fearful boredom of twenty years of it, she had to thrust back her doubts, conceal her exhaustion, deny her despair. A great thing, because he whom it was desired to strike in the heart was alone upon the beach's edge, with a few sails fleeing from his anger and ten dogs at his back against whom he would turn, whom he would put to flight with a look, knocking them away with the back of his hand, or driving them back to their lairs, only to begin again against the growing pack of them, with his wrists and his thighs bitten, with his blood dripping in the snow and dust, and all the while his unapproachable enemy—the only one of whom he was conscious—sneered at him, knowing herself to be out of reach, watching the growing anæmia of the colossus and realizing that death was climbing slowly to his heart. He skirted the edge of the gulf and ran so that he should not roll down into it. "He thought that if he kept still, he would fall."

Was he wrong? What do we know of that? What shall we ever know? One enterprise brought about a fresh one beyond it, which again caused yet another. Latinism had not been able to confine itself to defeating Teutonism in Provence and in Lombardy, it had had to nip future invasions in the bud, it had had to cross the Rhine, and enter the deep forest. Teutonism, victorious over Latinity in the plains of Valois, had to pursue it, in order to destroy the last germs of it, into the rugged gorges of the Rouergues and the Albigenses. Unless the Revolution was ceaselessly spreading, it would die where it was, like a fire without fuel. Napoleon's wars? "*Were they of my choosing, then? Were they not by force of circumstances and in the nature of things always part of the struggle between the past and the future, and due to the constant and permanent coalition of our enemies, who placed us under the obligation of conquering unless we were to be conquered ourselves?*" "He felt," says Emerson, "as all wise men feel, that as much energy is required to preserve as to create."

It is for this reason that he was permanently a dramatic figure. With the largest and the finest material at his disposal that any man ever had, with ten nations on their knees to him, and the Church his slave, with immense and fanatical armies which he manipulated with the certainty and ease of a duellist holding the lightest and most supple of rapiers in his hand, he felt as though he were suspended in his own solitude, a living anachronism, even though necessary to his age, because of the freakish strength of his nature, a living contradiction to every epoch because of his contempt for machine-like customs and mischievous interests, a living antithesis of the terrible inertia of the powers of the past which were in league against him. War was not sufficient, nor was peace, nor law, nor order. Material domination over the world, the means of spiritual domination over the world would escape him altogether if he did not thrust down in all directions—into the very prejudices, the customs, the still unsatisfied desires of the world—roots which would reach to the very deepest layers, there to fix themselves and gain their nourishment. "*In the harmony of universal comfort and well-being of which I was dreaming,*" he said, "*if there was a defect in my personality and my high position, it was that of having suddenly sprung up from the common herd. I was conscious of my isolation, and so I threw out anchors of safety on all sides to the very bottom of the sea.*" He wanted kings to be a function of the French Revolution. He mingled those of them whom he created with those of the reigning families, which he subjected to his system at the risk of dislocating it. He was confronted with the determined hostility of monarchies, and his wars were only a means of pinioning these monarchies in the bonds of marriages and alliances which would make them responsible to the Western democracy which he wanted to organize for the conquest of the future. His own Austrian marriage was in obedience to this same instinct, in which pride, political interest, and wide-spreading ideas with regard to the future were entangled. The rarest genius, he who seems to go straight towards his goal at a bound, is composed of contradictory beings which turn and rend each other, and though the blaze of his deeds and his glory may appear so established and so sure, his inmost depths are stained with blood. The great man always has several pretexts to justify his actions, and these are the pretexts which those who analyse him, isolating them, regard as his exclusive motives. Yet subsequently, when the great man looks back upon the road he has traversed and wishes to explain his actions, he often does not know why he performed them. In reality it is simply his power which brings his pretexts with it and conditions them, and his pretexts are really only the theme of his work of art.[1]

3

War, peace, and blockade; the passions of men and of nations; his own passions; he played with all these in the mighty unity of a strength which grew by its own substance and which envisaged the destiny of the world only in terms of its own destiny. France, his mistress, never failed him, but he often failed her in the broad, impetuous exercise of a sensuality for which France was no more than sustenance, even though she was always the most loved of all, his only love; even though he always came back to her, depended upon her alone, and found only her to nurse him upon her bosom when he returned bleeding from some ardent adventure. He seized each nation in turn, either by means of his fame or in war, by conferring benefits upon them, or by punishing them; he fertilized them or violated them and forsook them in turn. And as so often happens to women when a man takes them, they withdrew from his embrace transfigured and morally broadened.

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[1] See Appendix. Note 25.

Was it a mistake or a crime on his part that he revealed European peoples to themselves? A futile argument: France paid the cost, it is true, but that is her rôle in history. Nor is it the least noble of rôles. Modern Europe, through the terrible missionary whom France has so often provided, is indebted to her for having begun to learn about itself. Before Napoleon's time, apart from England and France, no European people had a sense of nationality. Everybody was more or less indifferent as to whether he belonged to this man or that, whether he passed from one master or another, whether he felt the same blood as another man's coursing through his veins. Napoleon arrived, and when he did so everything was changed. Not that he relied upon persuasion or love. On the contrary he generally mistrusted the nascent national spirit. He cut Germany into little bits, which he united again haphazard ten times over, in the conviction, no doubt, that patriotism was a luxurious sentiment unknown in such impoverished countries, which were in any case incapable of resisting the political advantages which he meant to bring them. But it was precisely by this perpetual disintegration that Germany was revealed to herself for the first time. He was brought violently up against the religious spirit of Spain—a fact which for the first time brought the moral unity of Spain to life in the souls of Spaniards. And since it was he whose sword was the first to touch the heart of Russia it was he who quickened the sluggish beating of a heart that was ignorant of its own existence. Italy, thanks to him, pieced together her fragments for the first time since the fall of Rome.

It was through him, and for the needs of history in the future, that the individuality revealed to mankind by the Renaissance appeared among groups of men. And hence, by virtue of a second task, came the source of a moral individuality common to all men and to all groups of men, which—too soon—he tried to impose upon them. "*Europe,*" he said towards the end of his life, "*will soon resolve* *itself into not more than two hostile groups; it will no longer be divided by nations and by territory, but by colour and by opinion. And who can foretell the crises, the duration, and the details of the storms that will ensue? But the issue cannot be obscure. The intelligence of the century will not be retrogressive."* There speaks a disciple of the philosophers. And it is not for me to blame him or to praise him for so doing. To curse the Revolution is easy. To suppress it is less so. The Revolution is an historic fact, of which the consequences, whether beneficial or evil, whether reassuring or terrible, are continuing and will continue to develop. Napoleon's greatness lies in this: that he realized that at the period when he appeared, if he were not to be defeated at once and for ever in the very spirit of his task, he would have to utilize, direct and co-ordinate the Revolution. Such indeed was the opinion of the monarchs and diplomatists who assembled at Vienna in 1815, congratulating themselves upon having cut off the hydra's head, for it was thus that those poor fools regarded him. When they heard that this man had once more set his foot upon the soil of France, a wild excitement took possession of them, as in a menagerie at the approach of the wild-beast tamer. Yet he was alone. And all Europe was still under arms. But the Revolution, like Antæus when he touched his mother, had been born again.

4

This continuous sign of historical necessity in Napoleon's actions explains his faults and excuses them. For, if he had not been himself, he might merely have kept his two thrones and died in the Tuileries in a tumult of adoration. "*No one except myself,*" he said, "*was the cause of my fall. I was my own chief enemy, the engineer of my misfortunes. I wanted to embrace too much.*" And therein, indeed, was the mistake which, though it ruined him, perhaps saved the world. The new France, moved from her orbit by the amalgamation of the Low Countries and the Hanseatic cities, was too vast. Russia was too far away. Spain was too hard-set. And all these, remember, at one and the same time. His policy was too widespread for the means at his disposal: his army was becoming anæmic, it was debased by the recruitment of foreigners and so was losing heart; his pawns were too far away for him to watch them properly on his gigantic chessboard; and his communications were too slow for him to reach its extremities in time to be of use. All at one and the same time. When he marched on Vienna he did not want to loosen his hold on Spain. Nor even when he marched on Moscow. He felt that, it is obvious enough, but his fate outran him. And so, in 1809, when he was at the height of his power and Cambacérès wrote to wish him a happy New Year, he replied: "*I shall have to be clever if I am to give you the chance of wishing me the same thing thirty times more.*" A few months afterwards, after his Spanish adventure, in fact—though up till then not a single war could have been laid at his charge—it might have been said that he took a share in the ensuing persecution, that his method of preventing war by starting it unnerved him and precipitated him into it; that the ground seemed to be slipping from under him, and that he clung to war as a shipwrecked man clings to seaweed. He was the servant of the destinies of Europe, and condemned to obey them.

If the fatality of circumstances had induced him to lead his armies (which in spite of everything were an emancipating force) everywhere, would he have been able to await his moment, end the Spanish war, for example, by putting his full weight into it, then finish Austria, then take a breathing space to collect his forces and instigate a long and prudent reorganization of his communications and all his bases before entering upon the Russian mystery, with Spain, Austria, Prussia and England in his rear? Undoubtedly, no. He was like a rock rolling down from slope to slope and collecting snow all the way, until finally, it is stopped by the snow itself. Dazzled with pride and power, losing his foothold, no longer seeing clearly what separated his action from divine action, which seemed to wait upon his pronouncement for its own manifestation, he extended the circle of his strength from day to day: he was its prisoner, condemned by it to enact its commands until he was exhausted. The vast combat which was his life went on widening ceaselessly and immeasurably. For he was conflict itself. His function was conflict.

He was in no way the cold calculator who weighs every one of his actions and subordinates them to a plan limited in all its details, impersonal, and outside the circumstances of the moment. He was master of himself in the executive sphere, but he was not so in that of sentiment: there his imagination carried him away; he presupposed in peoples and in kings intentions of contradicting him or of exalting him, of associating themselves with or opposing themselves to the grandeur of his designs. He meant everything that he said, at the moment when he said it. Like most of us, he was subject to the movements of his heart, which came and went, like the steps of a man walking, reacting differently to the objects which he encountered—sincere, tender, or frightening—and becoming irritated by the attitude either of the diplomat or the lackey. His words to Metternich: "*A man such as myself thinks nothing of the lives of a million men*"—another aspect of a supreme temperament soaring in its own plane, exasperated by human contingencies and human inertia, and wanting, moreover, "*five hundred million men as friends*," were only the terrible whim of a wild beast cornered by a pack of hounds, the cry of the man who was supporting the future of a world wherein thrones were making their appeal to human Pharisees to prevent themselves from crumbling. His political views were great, but into them entered unceasingly his man-like passions in a precipitate flood, enlarging them beyond a power to which even he was incapable of fixing practical limits, or straining them perceptibly. He hated England and did not conceal the fact. Against Prussia he had sudden fits of rage which burst out into the light of day. It was inconceivable to him that the wretched Spaniards did not approve of his intention to bring them into the movement of Western societies, and he said so. He despised his father-in-law and every one knew it. He loved Alexander, whom he treated as one treats a woman—with fond caresses, and afterwards with abrupt ill-humour. He lived his poem out loud and could not finish it because it was in his very deeds and because his life, if he ceased to live it, would have ceased to have any direction. He felt this so strongly that he expected that if he showed the least hesitation, the least delay, the slightest sign of faltering, the world would think that he was no longer Napoleon. "*With my career already settled* *and with my ideas for the future, it was necessary that my progress and my successes should have something of the supernatural about them.*"

Moreover, for such a man as this, of what importance was final success? He embraced too much? So be it. By giving up Spain he might have been able to seize Russia; by giving up Moscow, to seize Spain; or perhaps by giving up both Spain and Moscow, to seize England? So be it. And afterwards? The disinterested poem which he was living, and compelling the world to live, would have been much less complete. His admirable talents were fostered by his very excesses: they allowed him to commit them and to die because of them, whilst giving the impression, up till the very end, that he was growing greater at every stage and that in committing them he had the strange presentiment that they would bring him to bay at his masterpiece—that campaign in France in which in two months he built up the finest monument of energy, of decision, of character, of creative imagination, of moral courage and of pride which was ever conceived in the heart or mind of man. He was like a founder who, seeing that his fire is burning low and that his metal is cooling too soon in the mould, throws into the furnace, for lack of other fuel, furniture, shutters, doors, floor boards, and even shreds of his own flesh.

One thing only counts for the future and that is the quality of the deed. Although the treaty which followed 1814 was regarded as disastrous and that which followed Wagram as glorious, 1814 has done more than Wagram for his memory and for France herself. I am not unaware that in the political sphere such things as these are not admitted. In the political sphere constant use is made of the basest utilitarianism, and the idealists are the first to be always talking of Providence distributing rewards to the good and punishments to the wicked. But in the sphere of poetry, things are quite otherwise. It is not by the price which a work fetches, or by the official and social advantages which its author gains from it that its value, when he is no longer present, is judged. But it is by the sum of moral and sentimental influence, of admiration and of anger, in short, of movement in men's intellect and of passion in men's hearts which it inspires that it is judged. Of what account are the two Americas, with their gold and diamond mines, their forests, their multiplying populations, the colossal wealth which they are pouring out into the world, as compared with the lightning flash of soul which made Columbus determine to plunge into the Unknown ?

XII

The Chisel

I

THOSE who do not admit war in principle should read no further. For at this point we touch upon that terrible phenomenon, which is doubly privileged in the domain of the mind in that it reveals with the most cruel vividness both the man who is enslaved and the man who is free. I am not referring to the poor devil who goes through a war as a private soldier or as a workman, resigning himself to being its passive instrument or its surly victim. Nor am I referring to him who with no other end in view but promotion or a decoration for himself sends a herd of unfortunate men to their death from the end of a telephone wire or from an observation post. I mean, rather, those who are capable of judging war as a whole, taking into account the innumerable elements which compose it and produce it, and the consequences which follow upon it; those, that is, who do not conceal their cowardice behind the mask of the preacher quibbling over the legality or illegality of pretexts, but who look it in the face, seeing it for what it is and as it is, and who refuse either to judge it according to the immediate results which it produces or to close their eyes to its horror. But even when this great effort has once been made, a still greater one is yet required, and it is by means of the latter, it seems to me, that one can distinguish the two forms of brain which I have described earlier. The one man rejects war altogether, refuses to employ it and so run the terrible risk of a century of carnage, in order to spare his optimism the wound of a flat contradiction. The other, discovering that war can be made a disinterested game, is prepared to seize the chance which it gives him to dominate his pessimism for a moment. . . . Those who do not admit war in principle should read no further.

The greatest man who ever made war or propounded its maxims knew well enough what a terrible instrument had been placed in his hands by that chance which, from the very moment of our birth, either lavishes upon us or withholds from us the means of rising above our fellow-men. Indeed, I suppose it was precisely because of that that he *was* the greatest man who ever made war or propounded its maxims. Our activity is exercised in a field which is by nature mental, and the way in which we regard that field is what fixes its frontiers, determines its contours, and makes us more or less capable of moving over it with a firm tread. Napoleon was not a militarist: he was a poet. He was not a great captain: he was a great man. And that is a very different thing. He accepted his gifts, not for the pride and the power which he obtained from them, but because he knew that if he did not accept them he would not succeed in finding within himself those sources of energy, of reason, and of imagination which through them were opened up and spread through his whole being in order to foster it and proclaim it. Not only did he not believe that war was the most noble, or indeed the only noble means at the disposal of mankind for the purposes of preservation and creation, not only did he definitely regard it—sometimes severely and even ingenuously—as an *anachronism* and the supreme convulsion of primitive brutalities which it was his mission to crush, but the sight of it often made him suffer, and, though he may have been drunk with it, the morrow of his bouts produced a nausea which he did not conceal. Useless slaughter sickened him and made him loathe himself sometimes. At Ebersberg, where Masséna allowed three thousand men to be killed in taking a bridge the capture of which was of no importance, he was indignant and shut himself up to hide the tears which he was shedding. It was on that day, I think, that he discovered the word "butchery" to describe such an episode. "*Do you want to deprive* *me of my coolness, then?*" he asked an officer who informed him, in the course of a battle, that the massacre was increasing. "*I am always at Eylau,*" he wrote to Josephine. "*This country is thick with dead and wounded. That is not the fine side of war. People suffer, and it oppresses one's spirit to see so many victims.*"

Note that he hid these weaknesses, since he accepted war and waged it; for such weaknesses, far from checking war, enhanced its horror by leaving men hesitating and disarmed when confronted by it. Note that, with a profound understanding of the bloody disorder which could be produced by the failure of a leader even when the drama had been carefully organized, he once said: "*He who does not look upon a battlefield with dry eyes sends many men to death uselessly.*" Note, above all, that one always finds him face to face with the reality of war, master of himself, exempt from all depressing sentimentalism, from all silly idealism, from that hypocritical attitude which denotes in those who assume it a fear of being oneself, an absence of any real courage, a despicable impulse to influence mediocre minds by means of romantic words and platform gestures. "*It is said of me that one night I took the place of a sentry who had fallen asleep. It is the sort of suggestion that a bourgeois or an attorney might have made, but certainly not a soldier. . . .*" Note that in another saying of his, "*Wars which are* *inevitable are always just,*" he refused to be taken in by the tinsel morality with which the Tartufes of diplomacy and of the schools try to dress up war. Note the clear, and, in consequence, the magnanimous, way in which he accepted the import, the nature and the results of his actions. Then you will understand that it was his ordering and his powerful and conscious harmony which ruled over the chaos and gave it rhythm. Then, too, you will make an effort to stifle your horror at the terrible art of war; the art which, of all those wherein the material is Man himself, offers to Man the greatest number of responsibilities to assume, of passions to tame, of energies to employ, of revolts to suppress and of visions to realize, and which gives him the opportunity to obtain immense results with mediocre means and reduced sacrifices.

2

In actual fact, in studying war one is given the impression of true art and, sometimes, the feeling of a spiritual harmony comparable to that of the most perfect creations of the painter, the poet or the musician, only if there exists a strong contrast between the importance of the problem to be solved on the one hand, and, on the other, the soberness, the simplicity and the delicacy employed in the course of its solution, the paucity of material and tools available, and the impression that, with the maximum of responsibility and risk, the most complete triumph costs only a minimum of damage and of bloodshed. This is the feeling which one gets from the campaigns of Hannibal, Lucullus, Cæsar, Turenne and Frederick the Great, and, in a far more striking degree, from those Napoleonic symphonies—Italy, Marengo, Austerlitz, Jena, 1814—wherein, in comparison with the unexpected and prodigious splendour of his success, the rapidity of conception and of execution which produced it, and the irresistible enthusiasm of those who strove for it in close communion with their leader, the bloodshed does not seem to have weighed more heavily upon the people as a whole than the effort expended by an orchestra when the grandeur of a sonorous poem uplifts the audience. In 1796, with his ragged hordes, he took twice as many Austrians prisoner as he had troops under his own orders, captured six times as many guns as he had himself, destroyed five armies in succession—the best of them in a few days—conquered Italy and dictated terms of peace to Austria, although she was victorious in the north. In 1800, a battle fought at his selected place with 18,000 men, gave him back this same Italy, which the generals of the army of the Rhine had lost. In 1805, simply by manœuvring, he captured an entire Austrian army, and, in a single battle, in which he lost less than two thousand men, he dispersed another, crushed the Russian army and broke the power of the Holy Roman Empire for ever. In 1806, *in one day*, he destroyed the Prussian monarchy. In 1814, with only a few thousand peasants and conscripts, he held the whole of Europe in arms at bay for two months; and though he was brought low, he was never defeated. To those who believe that chaos cannot order itself and that tragedy offers the finest opportunity for the will of man to assert itself, it is impossible to imagine a more complete triumph of mind over matter, of organizing brain-power over blind brutality.

There is an affecting contrast between these perfect works of art and the wars which he undertook from 1809 onwards. Here his manœuvres were slower; it is as though they were sodden and overloaded. The results were more questionable, the procedure more costly. The battles were long and sometimes indecisive, and the casualties were nearly always very heavy. He once used a phrase which is thoroughly characteristic of a man working in the sphere of action and obliged to appeal to an intractable material—men, nations and states, their passions and their interests: "*I have never been master of my movements: I have never really been entirely myself.*" I imagine that he was thinking, above all, of these hard campaigns; of the mud of Poland and the snows of Russia; of the rain in Germany and the fiery heat of Castile; of the destruction of his armies by the quicksands and the storms of Nature, who had herself become his enemy; of his armies advancing unwillingly, with monstrous convoys trailing in their wake and leaving their sick behind them on the roads and tracks to have their throats cut. The inordinate extension of his political action provoked an extension of military action of which the farthest points were so far removed from the centre that paralysis of the periphery steadily increased. The greater the total of his effectives became, the less sure and simple were his strokes. He lived in an age when transport was slow-moving, when communications were sluggish, when it sometimes took eight or ten days to get in touch with his lieutenants and as many more before he received their reply, and when the enemy had time to manœuvre between the issuing of his orders and their execution. His conception was always as prompt as ever, but the line of communications which he had to protect, the masses which he had to move, arm and supply from a distance, hampered his plans, confused them with indecision and incidental details and caused conditions to alter before they could be put into execution.

He may be compared at this period with the conductor of an excellent orchestra: all the members of it existed as a complete whole in his mind and in his heart, but suddenly he saw that the number of his performers (who, moreover, had been gathered from every point of the compass, did not know each other and belonged to different schools) was increasing twofold, threefold, tenfold; that their united efforts were lifting the roof off the concert-hall; and that they were no longer watching his baton and were invisible to him. He would be lucky indeed if half of them did not slip away on the appointed day or did not leave him in the middle of a symphony. For he was not only conductor of the orchestra. Administration, policy, international psychology, surged too heavily and too hurriedly upon him. He was the impresario too. He was concerned with accommodation and board for his performers, with publicity, with the financial and moral exploitation of his huge concerts. The opinions, the impulses, the interests of his public, the selfish motives that he roused within it, began to take a share in the execution, which became daily more active: at first this share was isolated and anarchic, but later it was coherent and collective—and against him. He was triumphant still, no doubt, by dint of his energy, his activity, his genius, and because of the fear and the respect which he inspired. But his blood was flowing; he was exhausting himself; he was being strangled. He could really revive only when he returned to his original performers, even though they were fatigued and jaded. Military art is no different from other arts. It requires a number of restricted elements, which must in every case be directly under control of the artist and of which he must know the texture, the density, the form and the nature of their reactions on neighbouring elements. In his case this was clear enough. It has been asserted that in the last act of the drama he shrank back at the very moment when he was about to deliver his most wonderful speech. He was always Napoleon; but Napoleon was only himself when he was at grips with a thing. Only in his absence was there confusion and waste: his lieutenants would hesitate when they were engaged with enemy forces which were as undecided as they were themselves. But the moment he arrived—in Spain, for instance, or in Saxony or in Champagne—it was as though a gale had sprung up: minds, hearts, wills, were inspired; armies, stirred like leaves, whirled along in his wake or were scattered before him.

3

His enemies would recognize his presence as quickly as did his own troops; and his presence disturbed the former as much as it exalted the latter. In the one case he inspired terror in the other confidence. It was not so much actual victory which gave him this incomparable ascendancy over those who were fighting under his command, as the certainty that the victory would be rapid and easy and that their lives would assuredly not be wasted. "*Moral force, rather than numbers, wins victories.*" The art of war is admirable in this respect; it communicates the temperament of one single man to a hundred, or a thousand, or a hundred thousand other men, animates them with the one man's talents and passions, and makes them share, as though they were collectively a solid block of strength and life, in the secret workings of his heart and brain. Napoleon let his troops see his point of view and explained his action to them; he induced in them the feeling that success depended to some extent on their ability to understand its conditions and to accept its risks, and on their zeal in pursuing it along the roads which he would show them. He turned their morale to account and soothed their depression or their fatigue with promises—which he kept. His own delirium enabled him to feel that their enthusiasm was waxing to the point when he could grasp his opportunity and divine the exact moment when, a spark having flashed between the commander and his army, he could issue his decisive orders. Even the state of the enemy's morale, which he guessed by means of the irresolution, or the regularity, or the nervousness, or the ingenuity of the hostile manœuvres, entered into the harmony of the battle, though he was the only man to perceive that harmony because it was he who was creating it. "*War is like government; it is a question of tact.*" It was this tact which enabled him to venture upon actions which were always successful but which would have been described as mad if he had put them forward as suggestions at a distance from the battlefield. Daring is the most essential and the most irresistible part of genius. The intuition of the possible—which is the whole of poetry—brings forth a second reality of which genius has only to take possession. Napoleon did not take his battles as they came to him: he imagined them.

This way of envisaging and realizing war was so new that no one understood it. He found war a fixed science and he brought it to a living art. He brusquely replaced the straightforward melody, which every one before him had used, by a complete symphony in which the quantity and the relations of the constituent parts could be changed but into which he introduced for the first time, and for good, all the material, moral and psychological elements of war and connected its conduct with the strategical, economic and political problems of which it is, at the selected time and place, the desired and sought-for solution. After his time, of course, this high art of his was turned into a science; for there are very few men who are capable of understanding that life is untiring in creating new forms and new necessities, and that of all the teachings of genius, with its one unchangeable characteristic of seeing nothing but its goal and of organizing all its faculties to reach it, it is precisely this which must be preserved. "*Genius acts through inspiration; what is good in some circumstances is bad in others. Principles must be regarded as axes in their relation to a curve.*"

No one, then, understood him, except simple-minded persons and a few young generals trained in his wars and brought up outside academies, formulæ and routine—men who, if they were to be victorious, had to invent everything, just as he had to do. Before him, including even the period of the Revolution, it was all a matter of marking time, of marches and counter-marches, of going into winter quarters, of battles in line close to a frontier, after which the campaign was postponed till the following summer, of trenches, of siege following siege, interminably; no one looked over the enemy's shoulder to find the vital spot at which to strike. So powerful is habit that ten or even fifteen years after Napoleon's appearance the generals opposed to him still waited for him, instead of springing upon him. Even when they wanted to surprise him, they waited for him. But it was he who used surprise, even when—especially when—he had to traverse a distance that was three, four, or ten times greater than that which his enemy had to traverse. With him it was no longer a question of the commanders of armies giving each other a rendezvous, as though for a duel, and the one who arrived there first waiting politely for the other ; it was no longer a question, as in former days, of mere tactical skill being practically the whole of the game. It became a question of operations carried out at long range: their course was directed by him from a distance and their climax meant a dictated peace. He used to say that in the army of the Rhine no one knew how to make war. There were good tacticians in it, certainly, and men who were above all thoroughly capable of training troops. But of strategists there were none. If there be any doubt of the truth of this, let those interminable movements wherein the two opponents watched each other and dared not act even after a victory be compared with those lightning marches which sometimes brought Napoleon right to his enemy's heart without having pierced his breastplate, but which paralysed his movements before he had fought at all. In the military sphere, as in the political, he substituted constructive revolutionary dynamics for the revolutionary statics of defence and destruction.

It is for this reason that he was regarded as a barbarian by his opponents, and sometimes by his colleagues, though of these latter Hoche, and especially Desaix, were exceptions, and were worthy to be summoned by him to wage war on the grand scale. He is accused of immorality because he saw only the one object—to win—and because he used every possible means to achieve that object. To underdeveloped minds there is such a thing as intellectual immorality, and it is this latter, perhaps, which to them seems most scandalous. When anyone gave him a rendezvous, he did not go to it, or he fell upon the rear of the general who gave it to him. As a realist, he paid no attention to any rules which had been drawn up before his time. With admirable vigour he introduced an unknown element into war. Democracy, thanks to him, no longer had to stake its honour on the observation of the laws of war as established by feudalism, but on its impulse to assert against it the elements of power and development which it bore within its breast. "*In war everything is moral.*" Let us be clear about the matter. Unlike feudalism, he always respected the civil population; he did not lay waste or pillage for the sake of doing so. Wherever he went he gave protection. But in operations of war, force and ruse were for him limited only by the necessities of those operations. War was war, and as such it had to achieve its aim. Hence, in opposition to military feudalism, he introduced into manœuvre a new meaning to war, just as the Encyclopædists and the Third Estate, in opposition to theocratic and political feudalism introduced into philosophy and ethics a new meaning to spiritual and civil society. Whence came this feudal honour? From a contract, more or less admitted, between the leaders of bands who infested the high roads. The most lofty palaces have their foundations in the earth. The idealist of to-morrow only gives a sense of style to the works of the realist of to-day.

4

Genius has been likened to madness. To me it seems the active manifestation of wisdom, preserving or rediscovering the sense of relationship and of proportion between things, when the majority of men lose that sense under the purring lethargy of habit and the quiescence of a minimum of effort. Hence come drama and art, reactions, probably, of life making directly towards its goal against the chronic engulfing of the mind. The whole Napoleonic system of manœuvre was directly determined by the same constant realism which, on an occasion when people were rapturously asking him the secret of his success, made him answer: "*Above all, it is necessary to have common sense.*"

Not once, except, it would seem, in the last act of his finest tragedy, when he heard that the enemy had reached the gates of Paris, and in order to return there quickly he abandoned an admirable movement in Lorraine which might perhaps have saved him, not once in the course of his campaigns do we see him yield to the very powerful attraction of a sentimental objective: the sort of objective which causes a man to lose sight of the true one in that, instead of first of all trying to annihilate the main force opposed to him, he seeks to dazzle the masses, enhance his own confidence, or satisfy his own vanity by the capture of a famous city, or of a district rich in natural resources, or of a province which had previously been surrendered with regret. Napoleon knew well enough that, once the essential task was accomplished, the city, the district and the province would be his—a little later on perhaps, but much more lastingly—even if he turned his back on them. If, in order to reach his opponent, he had to go through the district or the province and pass under the walls of the city, he certainly did not make the mistake of neglecting to occupy such city, district or province, because he knew that by so doing he would provide himself with an asset that would be moral as well as material, but he did so only on condition that he did not lose touch, even for an hour, with the mobile objective which he was pursuing. Thus he took Milan in 1796 and in 1800, Vienna in 1805 and in 1809, before he had destroyed the Austrian army, because Milan and Vienna were on the road which it was following. But, let it be observed, it was he who prevented that army from taking any other road by placing himself on each occasion between it and the city which it had been incapable of protecting.

This was his finest and his most usual manœuvre. It was very simple. But "*the art of war is like everything else which is fine and simple. . . . The simplest movements are the best.*" Coming from a long way off, when it was thought that he was guarding the high passes over the Alps, or facing England across the Channel, or emerging unexpectedly from the defiles of Bohemia, he always made a wide eccentric movement which brought him without fighting across his enemy's lines of communication, thus placing the enemy between himself and France but at the same time placing himself between Italy or Austria or Prussia and the enemy. It was, I repeat, very simple. It was also very dangerous. For he ran the maximum of risks, and, in the event of his being defeated, gave his enemy the maximum of advantages over him. But he obtained, if he were victorious, the maximum of results. Such a manœuvre anticipated a decisive victory, but his very audacity justified him in anticipating it. And hence, nearly always in a single battle, his audacity destroyed an enemy who was deprived of his resources.

In 1796 the manœuvre, as employed against five armies in succession, was almost the same from beginning to end: turning the Alps by the south in order to separate the Austrians from the Piedmontese, turning the Ticino and following the course of the Po to outflank the Austrian line of retreat, he entered Milan. Then, with his back to the peninsula which it was proposed to conquer—the task assigned to him by Carnot—he barred the peninsula to Germany by occupying the line of the Adige. In 1800, when he was expected at the point where he had formerly entered Italy, he forced his way through to Milan by the Saint Bernard pass in the north, thus pinning Mélas' army between the Alps and himself. In 1805, marching four hundred miles and crossing the Rhine and Bavaria, he arrived on the Danube at exactly the right moment between Mack's army and Vienna—which latter city that army was supposed to be covering. In 1806 the Prussians were concentrated so as to take him in flank as soon as he entered the plains of Saxony. But he made an abrupt wheel to his left, placed himself between Berlin and them, and destroyed them in a single day. Principle? No. An experiment. An experiment which his reason prompted him to try on the first occasion. He did so and did so again, because he knew why it ought to be successful every time. He "*thought quicker than they did,*" and therefore acted quicker. When they thought that he was far away, they would suddenly feel his teeth in the back of their necks. They considered the situation, they combined to take common action. But he was there, weighing on their arms, shackling their legs. "*I may be accused of recklessness, but never of slowness.*" And, to crown all, when they had taken up their own position and, though they had been surprised, were about to make use of their military science in order to repair the effect of their sluggishness, he would still fall upon them at the one point where they were not expecting him.

In short, it was his connected series of plans and the effort of bringing them to fruition that kept on the alert right up to the dramatic climax of the actual battle a creative imagination which was inspired by every circumstance and which responded to every circumstance according to the needs of the moment. Thus he was sometimes induced to repeat on the battlefield itself the movement which had originally brought about the action: as at Arcola, when he came out of Verona by the west, as though about to leave Italy, then turned south, crossed the marshes, fell on the Austrian rear and broke through and re-entered

Verona by the east. Sometimes he was committed to a course of action so daring that it meant either his destruction or else a justification of all the consequences of the original movement: at Lodi, for instance, since he had turned the Ticino, he had to capture the bridge-head by a frontal attack and was faced with disaster if he failed to capture it. On one occasion, as a counter to his own strategic invention, which the enemy was using against him by taking the Adige from the rear, he devised the manœuvre on interior lines on which, later on, the whole campaign in France was planned and which then enabled him to check forces six times larger than his own by pouncing upon them one after the other and destroying them in detail: thus, for instance, in five days, by means of those lightning-like movements of which Castiglione was the nucleus, he scattered sixty-six thousand men with effectives which did not total half that number, and then, dashing from the plain of Rivoli to the gates of Mantua with sixteen thousand men at his immediate disposal and less than forty thousand in his whole command, he annihilated double that number in three days.

He was continually adapting himself to circumstances. He did not think of his opponents as inert objects and argue that a series of movements would deliver him whatever happened. He knew that they were alive: so much alive that as a rule they obeyed his first wish, and thus he could announce in advance the movements which he would compel them to make. But he knew, too, that they were capable of unexpected actions and intentions which he would have to foil at once. "*In battles the great art is to change your line of operation during the action.*" Before him, contemporary with him, and after him, everything was systematic. Before him, there was the oblique formation of Frederick the Great; after him, came the turning of a flank. At Friedland, it is true, he turned a flank in order to destroy, in rear of the Russians, the bridges which would have enabled them to escape. But at Austerlitz, when the enemy weakened his own centre to bring off this same manœuvre against him, he threw himself upon that weakened centre and broke his line in two. At Montmirail it was he who, in order to induce the enemy to thin his centre and so give him (Napoleon) an opportunity to break through, made a feint flank attack. One could give countless examples. He was very wideawake. The unforeseen, which was a source of anxiety to others, delighted him and found him ready to cope with it. For a mind of this kind, the unforeseen does not really exist; for the shock, whatever it may be or wherever it may come from, at once evokes the logical response of a reflex which has been continuously trained by an alert intelligence. Somo-Sierra, a fortified mountain ridge, was captured by lancers. He confronted the surging hordes of mounted Mamelukes with infantry formed in squares—bristling citadels. *"Woe to the general who comes on to the battlefield with a system."* For the scientific manœuvres of the vulgar military pedant who wanted to alter circumstances to suit his principles—manœuvres which were, *a priori*, blind, cumbrous and brutal and stopped short if a grain of sand slipped into their complicated works—Napoleon substituted manœuvres which were organic, supple, sensitive, flowing like a lively stream through his main strategy, seeking at the same time to prompt his opponent to reactions which he himself expected and to which he was ready to respond, and, in those which he did not expect, discovering in an instant the weak spot at which he could strike.

His general conception of a campaign, this new idea in war—that of closing with and destroying the main body of the enemy's army without letting oneself be turned aside from that objective by any other considerations, whether political, sentimental, chivalrous or merely routine—developed thus by degrees until it also became his particular conception of the fighting itself. A fragment of a statue—supposing the statue to have been a beautiful one—is as beautiful as the whole, since it is a living part of the great complete movement of mass and continuity which determined the profiles, the shape and the plan of the whole statue. Whether the enemy was a hundred miles away or a hundred yards, Napoleon no longer fought in line, centre against centre, wing against wing, cavalry against cavalry. He fought with the whole bulk of his force, which he brought to the decisive point. "*There should be no question of dispersing one's attacks. On the contrary, one must combine them.*" He was always the stronger because he was always the more mobile. He went straight at the enemy main body with his own main body, leaving less important hostile forces to be watched by detachments. The great movement which was his favourite one—that of getting across the enemy's line of retreat—had the effect not only of separating the enemy from the heart of his own country, but also of separating his limbs, as it were, from his body. Having defeated the body, Napoleon would then pounce upon the limbs and cut them off one by one. "*The art of war consists in always having a stronger force than your opponent at the point at which you are attacking him or at which he is attacking you, although your army is weaker than his.*" Whatever the disposition and extent of the manœuvre, he was the spirit of it; he was its heart and its living centre. It gravitated round him.

5

He himself, as it happens, defined the character of his art. "*There are many good generals in Europe, but they see too many things. I see only one, and that is the masses opposed to me. I try to destroy them in the certainty that the accessories will collapse of their own accord afterwards.*" An admirable statement, which might be repeated, almost word for word, by the painter, the poet, the musician, the sculptor. The statement of a creator, who visualizes things comprehensively and in the mass, and who, happening upon the vision which is to be realized and regarding it as an uncarved block, as it were, sets it upright before him and at once sees in it the few points which are capable of emphasis standing out prominently and shaping themselves according to their own pattern.

The whole of Europe was his battlefield, even for the least of his battles ; and if he had lived in our days, his battlefield would have been the world. He always kept connection between the two furthest points on the military chessboard, and he never failed in the project which their relationship produced, except when the material means to accomplish it were insufficient. He knew that each of his movements would bring in its train a series of consequences which, owing to the dullness of human nature, would be repeated time after time with almost mechanical exactitude. He knew in advance, for instance, that after he had taken Vienna, the Archduke Charles, who ought to have followed Masséna, would be lured away from Italy and towards himself. Sprawling over his maps in Paris, he was seen to stick a pin into the town of Marengo, although at that moment his troops had not yet crossed the Alps. After Ulm he heard that Prussia had entered the lists against him, but instead of withdrawing towards the Rhine, which would have given the Prussians, the Austrians and the Russians time to reunite, he left an armed Prussia on his flank and fell upon the Austro-Russian armies in order to make an end of them first. The lines which would have to be followed by the armies engaged twined their curves and sorted themselves out in his brain like the movements of the stars in the brain of an astronomer or like melodious patterns of sound in the brain of a musician. He was begged one day to say which was his finest battle, and he asked his questioner what was meant by that. "*My battles,*" he added, "*cannot be considered separately. In no sense did they possess unity of place, or action, or intention. They were never anything but parts of very extensive combinations.*" The Egyptian expedition, the continental blockade, the Russian war even, played a preordained part in a martial symphony wherein a battle was only a transient episode which was capable of producing mediocre results with a considerable expenditure of character and imagination, but which more often had immense results with a minimum of effort.

All this has been badly misunderstood. Torrents of ink have been poured out to dispute his claim to the credit for Marengo, for instance. But a difference of one hour in the material execution of a gigantic manœuvre which had been planned beforehand in Paris, and which comprised the passage of the High Alps and the capture of Milan in the Austrian rear, in no way altered its harmony. It was no more than the breaking of one instrument in a giant orchestra. Masséna, whose resistance at Genoa made the manœuvre possible, has been mentioned in connection with this; and Desaix, who was responsible for its successful execution. But that proves, above everything else, that Napoleon knew how to choose his principal subordinates. Was the victory due to the sacrifice made at Genoa? Certainly. Art lives by sacrifice, and the high quality of Napoleon's art lay in the fact that the cruelty of the sacrifice to which he agreed made every one think that his work was imperfect. Sentimentalism, as I have said, played no more part in this art of his, which was above all else plastic and musical, than it did when Sebastian Bach or Michelangelo were engaged in evolving lines and masses from the formal or sonorous architecture which to them represented the universe. Nevertheless, the cruel art of these men created energy that was of the greatest benefit, and the contempt which they had for exploiting tears strengthened that feeling.

People talked of Napoleon's "desertion" in Egypt. But he had just received the news of the disasters in Italy and of the terrible situation in which France was placed. He knew quite well that while he was in Egypt he was only a "*wing of the army of England.*" He took in the vast battlefield at a glance. Then, risking probable capture, he embarked. But he left his army intact, after having made certain of his conquest less than a month previously on the sands of Aboukir. It was not, certainly, the behaviour of a soldier, nor even that of a leader. But it was that of *the* leader: not, at this moment perhaps, according to the Constitution, but according to his heart and mind. He behaved in the same way thirteen years later in Russia, when he left his tortured army and returned by himself to organize France and Germany against the reaction from the east. He behaved in the same way when, escaping from Elba, he landed alone on a hostile coast and advanced with his sword in its scabbard to untie the Gordian knot.

At the very moment when he was making this strange return he expressed himself decisively thus: "*My enterprise is to all appearances an* *act of extraordinary audacity. But in reality it is quite reasonable.*" He had a sense of the miraculous. Like all those who see a form in its entirety and grasp the formidable complexity of its organization at a glance so that they can understand its unity, he knew why, when and how the miracle would come to pass. Since he clearly saw the immediate goal and the route to it and recognized the common interests and moral forces which led towards it, whereas the majority of men saw only the material forces and the personal interests which separated him from it, he appeared, in the eyes of all men, as the man of miracles, the man who worked them and exploited them unceasingly. But all he did was to foresee the logical solution which scarcely anyone else foresaw, because foresight and logic are far from being part of every one's mental equipment. He had, moreover, a keen understanding of that peculiar inversion of mind which sees the supernatural in the rational order of things and to which the triumph of folly, routine and blindness seems, on the contrary, natural enough. "*The way to be believed,*" he said, "*is to make the truth incredible.*"

6

If I had to characterize the successive phases which enable this military genius to give to war the most poetical aspect which it has ever had—doing so, moreover, in less than twenty years, and abolishing the Gothic era from Europe for ever at the same time—three well-defined periods would stand out before me.

I see him first of all as a slim boy with untidy hair; as nerve-racked and worn out with insomnia; as having been brought up on romances and epics; as a recluse, fearful of the hidden passion which compresses his lips, makes his eyes sink deep in their sockets and tautens the skin on his face. . . . I see him, in the terrible waxing of a new and unprecedented glory, thrilling men, and thrilling women too, to the point of intoxication, inspiring lyrical fancies in the hearts of musicians, whilst he himself is dazzled by the flashes which flit across his brain and day by day reveal war to him as a poem in action such as no man has hitherto lived; I see him inventing everything with inexhaustible inspiration, overthrowing the old feudal armies one after the other, collecting their guns and their colours in armfuls, plucking their captured cities like flowers and throwing them affectionately to his barefooted rabble. That is the romantic period; the period of Italy, of Lombardy and of Egypt; the period of the marvellous march towards the sunrise; the period in which were present the fantastic fairylands of Carpaccio and Shakespeare, the mighty, soaring figures of Tintoretto and Michelangelo, the Thousand and One Nights, the mariners of Salamis, the phalanxes of Alexander, the wandering Ulysses, the Golden Fleece, the great triremes with their purple sails bearing mailed hoplites and players of flutes and lyres —and all these awakening in the eager spirits of the soldiers of the Languedoc the scarcely hushed echoes of those divine voices which on every southern shore had acclaimed the birth of Illusion. . . .

I see him, a little later, with his health restored, certain of himself and more calm at heart; with love mastered and his romances and epic stories put on one side because he is busy in drawing up the Code. All this shows in his features, which are now smooth and white. The structure of his frame is still apparent but is a little less prominent. His hair is cut short, his whole demeanour is at once peaceful and dominating—that of the Master henceforth to be recognized as such. His uniform is neater, quieter. And now it is no longer a little band of men which obeys him enthusiastically and faithfully, but the army itself and the whole people. . . . I see that a closer contact with the French nation and with the army of the Rhine is enhancing his gifts and introducing more harmony and proportion into their mutual relations; I see him organizing his Grand Army, which is now well clothed and fed, magnificently equipped, and thoroughly contented, into a powerful whole in which are blended all the provinces of Gaul, and none others but they, for the purpose of imposing upon Europe by their irresistible operations the architectural idea of the new civilization which is to be built. That is the classic, or French period, from Marengo to Jena; the period in which the discipline of Corneille, the melodious cadences of Racine and Poussin, the Cartesian method extended to include the manœuvres of Turenne, the fortifications of Vauban, the gardens of Versailles—those shady main roads which carry life and strength from the centre to the extremities of the nation's limbs—gave the people and the troops a continuous impression of definite victories of reason and will-power over sentiment and instinct. . . .

I see him, finally, when he is beginning to grow stout and new emotions are stirring in the depths of a heart which sovereign power has contracted. His brows are knitted in a frown, his fine, but pitiless, features are a little clammy, for his skin has become injected with bile. The collar of his greatcoat rises high on his thick neck, his hat is crammed lower on his head and his hair has grown thin. . . . As I see him now it is with a weakening hand that he controls his vast flocks of vassals and mercenaries: their French nucleus is gradually withering, and their flesh, apathetic and flaccid first, then by degrees poisoned, then permeated with gall and lymph, becomes coarsened as it is dragged bleeding to the hecatombs in dull masses grudgingly obedient to the impetus of a darkened brain which, in order to decorate the palace of its dreams, still obtains from them sumptuous or sinister effects, rich barbaric harmonies, blood on an infinity of snow or swirling dust rising from burning plains. That is the mystic or Oriental period in which the sombre Spanish heart, the incomprehensible, reeling Slav soul, the soporific and yet regenerating tides of Africa and of Asia, mingle their heavy alluvion with the clear waters of the West; it is the period of eternal struggle, of the alternating victories of Dionysus and Apollo. And then at last, so that the demiurge may prove that he has remained capable of an immortal renaissance, of a rejuvenation which is always fresh and which springs from his lyrical power, there comes, not a new period, but a lightning-like dance at the edge of an open abyss, a sudden fusion, in a supreme symphony, of the grand classic measure wherein France recognized her means and her destiny with the romantic passion wherein the springs of the ancient Myth came bubbling abruptly to the surface.

XIII

Prometheus

I

ROEDERER, talking one day with Napoleon about the deeds and intentions of the latter's brother, Joseph, was answered thus: "*It is a good thing that you are going to be near him. He is still doing things which create discontent in the army. When my men are killed by Spaniards he has the culprits tried by Spanish Commissions. He is unaware, apparently, that wherever my armies go there exist French Courts-Martial which try cases of assassination committed against the troops. . . . He wants to be popular with the Spaniards and he wants them to think that he likes them. But the affections of kings are not the same as the tender feelings of a nurse for her charges; kings ought to make themselves feared and respected. . . . The king writes to tell me that he wants to return to Morfontaine;*[1] *he thinks he will make matters awkward for me, by taking advantage of a moment when, as it so happens, I am fully occupied with other affairs. . . . He is threatening me just at the time when I have*

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[1] Morfontaine, or Mortefontaine, near Ermenonville (Oise), an estate belonging to Joseph Bonaparte.

handed over my best troops to him and when I am going off to Vienna with only my little conscripts, my name and my big boots. . . . He says that he would rather go to Morfontaine than remain in a country bought by blood which has been unjustly spilt. That is the kind of phrase that appears in an English lampoon. What, might I ask, is Morfontaine? It represents the price of blood which I shed in Italy. . . . Yes, I shed blood. But it was the blood of my enemies, the blood of the enemies of France. Does it become him to speak their language? If the king is King of Spain, it is because he wanted to be so. If he had wanted to stay at Naples, he could have stayed there. He thinks he is going to embarrass me, but he is much mistaken. Nothing shall stop me. My plans will be carried through. I have the necessary will-power and strength. Nothing shall embarrass me. I have no need of my family, unless it is French. My brothers are not French. I alone am French. . . .

" I love power. But it is as an artist that I love it. I love it in the way that an artist loves his violin. I love it because I can produce sounds, tones, and harmony from it; I love it as an artist. The King of Holland, too, is talking about his private life! But of the three of us it is I who am most capable of living at Morfontaine. In me there are two distinct men: the man with a brain and the man with a heart. I play with my children, I chat with my wife, I read to them, I read novels to them. . . ."

I have quoted this powerful passage because, for one thing, it inspired me to write this book; because, coming from Napoleon's lips, it takes on an almost supernatural meaning; because, with the exception of Montesquieu and perhaps of Diderot, and certainly with that of Rousseau, Voltaire and their disciples, the whole century into which he was born would have risen in revolt against its import, and because no one in his own epoch, not even Roederer (but Goethe always excepted), would have understood it; and because, finally, our own age is beginning at this very moment to appreciate its greatness.

Now that a vast scientific investigation has probed to the origins of mentality, reinstated the Myth, denounced the inadequacy and the misdeeds of morality, proved that motives and pretexts are identical and discovered the same principle underlying all forms of expression, a few persons are beginning to realize that Napoleon was a poet, that art is imagined action and that action is art which is actually lived. But that he, at least, knew this as a fact and said so; that his fabulous life showed a profound knowledge of the harmony, hopeless of attainment, to which it reached out across its own drama—that, at least, is comforting to whomsoever realizes that drama is no more than the heart's aspiration towards the definite conciliation of all the contradictions which it will never abolish.

This much must be repeated unceasingly. We see blood spilt but no minds enslaved. He may have been responsible for the deaths of many, but he belongs none the less to the same family as those who always look at an unshaped block of stone with the idea of carving a statue from it, or who listen to a medley of sounds and make a symphony from them; who hear cries of pleasure or of pain and transform them into the cadences of a poem or who purify in the flame of prose the profundity of words. Curiosity, uneasiness, agony, abandon, oblivion, war are the conditions of the system which the decree of Fate forces their nature to put before the universe; it is a system which totters for a moment when their eyes are closed in death, but which others re-establish or modify; which may last for a century, or for five, or ten; which always ends by crumbling away almost entirely; but which the illusion stored up in future humanity begins to follow again, and persists in following, across the bloody chaos of an eternal adventure, right on to the end. Like theirs, its whole moral structure is built round the central nucleus of passion and obsession; and a craving to explore is always its characteristic. Those who are not possessed of this terrible power are not dangerous, certainly. But they do not count.

"An inaccessible being . . . an epitome of the world," said Goethe. "With him, the light which illumines the mind was never extinguished for an instant."

The tyranny of the system (and in his case it was his own system) was such that while he always had to be in a position to modify its ideals at will in accordance with the means which he employed to achieve it in his heart, as he advanced he was obliged (like all those who express it in poetry or painting) to show it objectively under a systematic aspect which laid upon every one a tyranny which they accepted or against which they rebelled, but the necessity of which impregnated them for many generations. What distinguished him from the despot was the continuity of his designs. It was not because of a caprice, immediately to be ousted by some other caprice, that he imprisoned the Pope, confiscated kingdoms and improvised kings, but with the idea of defending and asserting, on behalf of and also against all men, a personality capable of understanding and embracing the universal. Nero, since he played at being an artist when he was not one, was sometimes comic and sometimes sinister. With Napoleon one is seldom inclined to laugh and never inclined to weep. . . . Always, everywhere, in all circumstances, he sacrificed his interests to his dreams and his comfort to his greatness. And what strikes one, when one makes a deep study of this man who was apparently such a deceitful schemer and impostor, was his terrible innocence. His lyrical will-power spread a veil over an exasperated world and transfigured it. And it was he, mark you, who was right when the world was wrong. Compared with him, a great artist, his contemporaries seemed wise because his contemporaries held to the mad ideas of the past. The great artist seemed mad because he followed the ideas of a wisdom yet to come. God, Who is only One Who walks, changes step from time to time so that He may not become fatigued. Napoleon fitted in with God's ingenuity. He was a step on God's road.

Against the resistance of vested interests, against prejudice and custom, he set up a new rhythm which ended by overcoming resistance. The strength which he used was not merely strength in the abstract. It was *his* strength. It was a function of his mind. And since he was a great individual and one who broke down the frontiers of the individual in order to weld, across them, whatever was social with whatever was universal, his strength was a function of Mind itself. What he himself said of it is applicable to all creative spirits : " *Will-power, character, application and audacity have made me what I am.*" Audacity in conception, application in studying and in experimenting with his medium, will-power in realization, character enough to oppose the intellectual scoundrels who bestowed upon themselves the epithet " honest persons "—these were enough, but they were very necessary if the great individual was to be confronted decisively and fruitfully with the great need which he expressed. Just as the poet seeks the absolute in emotion, so he sought it in action. He was a profound realist in the actual manipulation of his own medium—that is to say, in politics and war ; and so with him, as with the poet, reality became very quickly, and necessarily, the symbol of his visions. He ground it to a powder at will. The whole world of the living and the dead, of history and legend, of races and passions, soon became in his eyes only a dictionary which he consulted in search of a word or a rhyme to incorporate in the vision wherein his incurable illusion saw an end to his effort. He launched ideal lines into space ; his emotions materialized them and his reasoning power arranged them in patterns. With his faculties of foresight and control, his imagination pursued a tragic equilibrium ; he achieved it time after time for the duration of a flash of lightning, but then, since it was launched too violently, his imagination failed him, and instantly a further desire for equilibrium, more tyrannical still, was born again in his heart. The limit of his power, or at least of his power of realization —and it is in that alone that he differed from the man who works in the world of abstract things, outstripping him in one sense since his risk was greater—the limit of his power was mankind's instinct for making the minimum effort; and it was that instinct which in the end rebelled against him. The advantage of pure thought is that actual facts and events have no bearing upon it when sound, voice, colour and form are at its immediate beck and call. But if, by any chance, its lyrical appeal is even greater, so that it can imprison facts themselves in thought and divert action into the paths of imagination with such power that events are compelled to follow in its footsteps, a time comes when events bar its path and when facts, through their own inertia, find means to resist it. . . . Like Michelangelo, he was defeated by his medium: he did not finish his own tombstone.

2

When I try to evoke the vision of his course in history—which he filled and which, nevertheless, gives one the impression of a fearful solitude—I think of what Chateaubriand said in describing the famous scene where Louis XVIII, who had been received with acclamation by every one, appeared before Parliament with the object of coming to an understanding with it before the Usurper arrived: "The shouting ceased and there was silence. In that moment of silence one felt that one heard the footsteps of Napoleon in the distance."

His footsteps remained in the distance. I have more than once remarked upon that in this book. But it is a fact which has not been sufficiently realized, although this strange isolation constitutes the most imposing sign of his genius and marks his profound feeling that he was an exile amongst us. In his youth he tried to find isolation, ingenuously attributing the craving which he had for it to " the misfortunes which Corsica and his own family had undergone."[1] He loved the desert, that " ocean of dry land, an image of the infinite."[2] And it is the fate of those who are attracted by solitude and who eagerly seek the outward attributes of it to feel it mount in them in proportion as the clamour aroused by their success increases or as the rumour of glory begins to surround them.

This, then, was how he was situated. He was isolated from Europe by the flaming curtain of war and from France by his Italian temperament. He was isolated from the future by the hatred of his detractors and by the imbecility of those who flattered him. He was isolated from artists by their contempt for action and from the positivists by the lyrical quality of his actions. He was isolated from democracy by his aristocratic instincts and from aristocracy by his desire for democracy. He was isolated, at one and the same time, from the Believers and the Unbelievers by that indefinable faith of the poet which is the deepest of all, but which, for that very reason, bursts through the bonds of Faith. And all that was not enough: all that was nothing. He was isolated from the hearts of all men by the nature of his own heart.

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[1] Bourrienne. [2] See Appendix. Note 26.

It is true that he did not appear to be solitary, master as he was of half a continent, lord of men's bodies, lord of their souls, of their minds almost, with a terrible army to play with, and his name known in the solitudes of America and spoken of by the masses of Asia, with the whole universe exclusively concerned with him. Yet as his power subjected others, in their impotence, to him, so it alienated him from them. "He had the appearance," said Cambacérès, "of walking by himself in the midst of his own glory." Since the whole world was silent, I think that when he was walking he heard in his heart only the jingle of his own spurs. He was far more alone than anyone felt him to be, and yet anyone would have laughed to hear such a thing said. If a great man complains that he is not understood, those who answer him by saying that he is the cynosure of all eyes, that he is praised even in his absence, and that he is admired and loved, do not comprehend the true quality of solitude. The solitude of a great man increases as the number of those who turn their eyes towards his strength grows, for his own subjective law compels him to separate himself from them continuously and warns him against them more strongly than it blames him for the contrast between the needs of his soul and the nature of the praises which are showered upon him, the intentions which are ascribed to him, and the definition which is given of the ideas which he is following. People limit his rôle, define his genius, arrest his destiny, although his own desires are unconscious of any such frontiers, although his methods are unconscious of their power, and although he himself does not know the mission with which he is charged. You believe, then, that it was enough for him to possess ten thrones, to inspire terror, to make the world go mad on his account, and to be fulfilling the greatest destiny ever known! Paupers in thought that you are! To climb higher he had unendingly to wrench himself away from love. The louder grow the shouts round the hero in his progress, the more firmly is a profound silence established in his heart. Do not try to explore the solitude of this man on whom the eyes of ALL MEN were fixed.

"A beggar in the Infinite, asking the passer-by for the halfpenny which represented the empire of the world,"[1] there was never, in any epoch, a more unfortunate man than he. For the incomparable ecstasy of being himself he paid the penalty with the incomparable suffering of being the only one to know it. His words to Goethe were a cry of relief. When glory, after having achieved the extreme material limits of men's knowledge and memory, regarded itself as ungratified, his ransom was despair. And then, but only then, God welcomed him.

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[1] Léon Bloy.

3

This struggle taking place within him between his yearning for an inaccessible goal and the implacable inertia of facts, which compelled him to twist them in his hands like a tough metal, forces us to consider him with the contradictory feelings which meditation on life itself produces in our hearts. He himself was life carried to the highest degree of intensity and power, awakening love and hatred alternatively or simultaneously, according to the moment and the point of view, but asserting itself irrepressibly against morality and death. The destiny of this "incomprehensible being who, by despising his most forceful actions, discovered the secret of debasing them, and who raised his lowest actions to his own level,"[1] was a Pascalian conflict projected from the sphere of consciousness into that of events. An average mind condemns him; but he subjugated the instinct which brought back to him the superior brain triumphing over its own scruples in opposition to his soaring flight.

"The perfect hero," said Goethe, who refused to see any man as a hero except through the rather insipid conception of the Christian saint, that is to say, of the man who was ready to suppress his passions (which were often not very tyrannous) so that he might not suffer from them. But Napoleon possessed the strength to set his passions in order and to impose that order upon all men. The more terrible the chaos of passions in a man's heart the more arduous is the achievement of heroism. The "perfect hero" is he who loves war and yet suppresses murder, who loves love and yet masters women, who loves power while despising caprice, who loves glory but condemns praise, who loves life and risks death. There is one peril—love for the clan: Jesus crushed it in Himself, but it destroyed Napoleon. And another: public morality, which he made use of because his "system" willed it so, though he did not believe that its foundations were in the absolute. Apart from these incurable weaknesses, Goethe was right. There was no question of suffering, no question of enjoyment. The only question was to obey the decrees of his nature by cultivating them through the terrible contact of life, accepted as such, with its fullest consequences, even if that meant a daily internal drama in order to resist its assaults. It is too easy to hurl oneself into the struggle with one's eyes shut. It is too easy to fly from it. He looked that struggle full in the face and accepted it. And he had the rare power of preventing it from going beyond the rising level of his heart. Do not envy him and do not pity him. He would not understand your language. "*My heart rejects common joys as it rejects ordinary grief.*"

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[1] Chateaubriand.

There was in this an autonomous force which gave to the world far more than it received from it. It was from that force that he fostered life whilst forcing it from end to end: he was like an irresistible river; he left, on facts and on human beings, wider deposits as he approached the time when he was to lose himself in death. A gigantic faith inspired him, personal and obscure, yet absolutely invulnerable; it had nothing in common with ordinary beliefs, but was developed on the contrary on a basis of radical scepticism. In 1796, when no one had learnt faith, he alone had it. In 1814 he alone retained his faith, when all other men had lost theirs. In that, in truth, he seems to have been one of God's thoughts, charged by God to shape human material into a poem. His progress across the world coincided with a mighty drama, in which he became the principal actor, to which his imagination added fresh scenes and at the summit of which he stood continuously. This drama created marvellous myths, so that he might have the power to incorporate the realizable part of them in facts. He wanted to force back the East and found the nation of the West. Thus he revealed the West to itself and dreamed of bringing the whole of the East into the orbit of the West. Thus at the same time he was the champion of reason and of Western will-power against Asia and the new herald of Oriental mysticism in Europe. I do not know if he saw that clearly. But he felt it, which is better still. And, like Hercules, he even laughed at it: "*I have been carrying the world on my shoulders the whole time: it is a profession which, after all, does not allow me to be fatigued.*"

An immense fatigue, our own in fact, that of Man marching towards a destiny which does not grow weary of running away from us. A fatigue above which the heart of Man cannot rise unless it chances to beat within the confines of a great man's heart. Do we not seem to hear Æschylus himself uttering his terrible lamentation upon Man condemned sometimes to pass in his zeal beyond the frontiers of God without ever reaching Him and to fall back bleeding in the pride of his memories?

"*I am a new Prometheus. I am nailed to a rock and a vulture devours my body. Yes, I have stolen fire from heaven and given it as a dowry to France: the fire has returned whence it came—and I remain. The love of glory is like that bridge which Satan threw across chaos to pass from hell to paradise: glory joins the past to the future from which it is separated by a vast abyss. I have nothing to leave to my son, except my name.*"

XIV

His Impress

I

THE impress which a man leaves behind him is not so easy to determine as one might suppose. One can see its contours and its outward shape; but it is harder to explore the ground round it, to gauge the subsiding of the earth under its weight, to observe the characteristics of the roots which it has crushed or pushed back, and to mark the obscure movements of subterranean forces which, thanks to the upheaval which it has produced, act either in combination or in opposition and show up in the open at points where one is not expecting them. Even its contours and its outward shape give a false idea of its real value. Plaster moulds are taken of it and placed on shelves. People visiting the museum on Sunday stare piously at the dusty specimen which boisterous but obedient young students and earnest old maids have been copying all the week as an ornament for mantelpieces, magazines, and orthopædic institutes. A few of these visitors may hear the noise of the torrent outside, but how are they to suspect that there would have been no torrent if the aforesaid impress had not set free some invisible spring?

That Napoleon's influence in the political and sentimental sphere was inauspicious—on the surface, at all events—seems to have been proved. That his memory has engendered a disgusting popular image of him, that it has too often provoked the blare of the Hugolesque fanfare of brass and drum and even tempted the inspiration of the sentimental drunkard and the elegiac tippler, who, under the names of de Musset and Béranger respectively, blanched with solitary effusion and blotched with patriotic ardour millions of college students, sweet-merchants, and ladies of uncertain age—all that is undoubtedly sad: and especially so for those critics who took such fearful nonsense seriously. That his posthumous consciousness was saddled with Venizuelan *pronunciamentos,* with outbursts of pedagogy, with military masquerades and buffoonery, with the institution of the Second Empire, which was not merely a caricature but the exact opposite of his own—that, again, is regrettable—and especially so for the historians and moralists who were incapable of discerning the quality of certain deeds because all of them appeared identical. The fact that Napoleon was a poet is an irrevocable condemnation of his subsequent imitators: of the kind of man who lands on our shores with a stuffed eagle, of the provincial attorney armed with the tablets of *his* law and presuming to teach *him* something about it, of the hero of a garrison town who, in the name of civilization, severs with his sword the hand of a street-urchin because he has put out his tongue at him, of the music-hall comedian croaking about glory or execrating massacre to a catchy refrain, of the retired non-combatant captain or of the ex-convict.

The shade of Napoleon has served as a scarecrow or a banner for every party in turn, each of them making an exhaustive collection of those facts and anecdotes of his life which were most suitable for the furtherance of their own interests. With the help of low-class literature they made him out to be a slave-driver and a drum-major by turns. Nevertheless, Napoleon was no more responsible for Bonapartism than was Michelangelo for academicism or Jesus for clericalism. The world's interpretation of him rests on a time-honoured and incurable misunderstanding. He is hidden by a mask which is painted by the profiteers for their clientele of fools and beneath which his real face conceals both its convulsions and its serenity. The spiritual empire of a man begins at precisely that line where his prejudiced opponents, and, above all, his imitators, set the limits of its furthest frontiers. It is not difficult to point out Montaigne's influence on Pierre Charron or on the innumerable English scribblers who boldly called their lucubrations, which were of a very different calibre, "Essays." But I am not sure if it is realized that Shakespeare, Cervantes and Pascal would never have opened the gates of the modern mind to the West if it had not been for Montaigne. Every one is aware of the effect of Rubens on Van Dyck. But who can describe the secret, but decisive, effect which, two centuries later, he had upon the ideas of Lamarck, who, to all appearances, scarcely knew his name? The child who hands to a beggar the halfpenny which he has been given to buy barley sugar with, is much nearer to Christ than the priest who lives on Him. The child who takes a piece of charcoal and scrawls on the side of a broken-down shanty a picture of a dog lifting its leg against the wall is not so far removed from Raphael as the Academician who professes to teach in his name at the *Ecole des Beaux-Arts*. Mind is invisible, and therein lies its strength. I am not sure if Chateaubriand really saw this as regards Napoleon, and yet I cannot believe that a man of his ability could have been thinking of the external aspects of Napoleon's action when, neglecting its material character in order to point out where one should look for signs of its effect, he wrote this: "In his lifetime he failed to capture the world. When he was dead, it was his."

2

I will set aside the action, mechanical as it were, which his terrible apostleship immediately set up in Europe by leavening it irrevocably, and the effects of which, among many others, I have already described. There was something which was more useful to the peoples than the national unity and civil equality which almost all of them owed to him and which, moreover, they only truly realized when they were worthy of seizing them by the sword; something which is more useful even than the enormous circulation of credits and produce, the prodigious efforts of technical invention and industrial conquest, the vast network of nerves with which the whole globe was to be covered, the important repercussions of these events on the organization of labour—all things which national unity and civil equality made possible by creating large new societies and classes and unsuspected sources of energy and needs: more immediately useful in the spiritual sphere, at all events, since this energy and these needs engendered in their turn invisible forces which gradually transformed and fertilized men's minds. And that something was the unexpected attitude adopted by the world when there was revealed to deep-thinking men the mental and martial effort which had to be made to win that unity and that equality and their obscure consequences. That Fichte left his desk at fifty years of age to rejoin his battalion, proves not only that this effort was not indifferent to the march of life, but that it forced life in a direction which provoked in men's minds internal struggles susceptible of enhancing it, or even of radically modifying its value. Chateaubriand, Laplace, Madame de Staël and Benjamin Constant in France, Fox, Burke and Walter Scott in England, Goethe and Beethoven in Germany, Alfieri and Manzoni in Italy, and Goya in Spain, considered the moral destiny of the peoples to be dependent upon the victory or the overthrow of Napoleon—and that could not have happened without causing a tremendous shock to that very moral destiny. Was Napoleon responsible for it ? To me, it seems so. A man does not raise himself from complete obscurity and poverty to the most dazzling career that the world has ever seen without being in some way responsible for the spiritual fervour which humanity pours upon him in hatred or admiration.

But there is more to be said. There is, I think, a marvellous mystery in all this : a mystery which one dare not explore because it opens up too many roads and breaks down too many of the fences dividing territories which are supposed to be preserved and demarcated for ever. The man who creates drama in events creates it also in men's hearts. Intoxication, restlessness, cupidity, the spirit of adventure and the spirit of sacrifice, hold sway. Love roams abroad, catches fire, sows risk and grief. If a lover and his mistress, united in execration or in enthusiasm, or, on the other hand, separated by the emotions which voluptuousness harrows, reconciles and exalts, create a child in the delirium of parting or of meeting again, there is some chance that that child will become an exceptional force, with a surging heart and a bewildered soul, with a wild zest to live and to learn, and especially so when he grows up in the midst of the tumult which an unusual adventure rouses and makes audible all round him. In the interval between two campaigns he sees his father or his elder brother in gorgeous uniform and listens to epic stories told, as it were, under the very sound of salvos ; he is impressed by the silences and the tears of his mother or his sisters ; he is thrilled by the distant mirages evoked by names of countries and cities which cannot even be thought of without visions of golden cupolas rising from a snow-covered plain, or of minarets standing up above lakes and palm-trees, or of forests scaling mountains to the level of shining glaciers, or of staircases and statues in the midst of cypresses and roses, or of beautiful sirens with flowers twined in their hair and dark gleaming eyes. With love, death, glory, waiting for him on every road, a young man's imagination could not but receive the ineffaceable impress, craving to be given life, of the man whose fabulous existence was the pretext, the centre, the soul and the mind of all this. Bonaparte appeared in 1796. It was about 1809 when Napoleon attained the height of the triumphant period of his career; at the end of it his people became anæmic and the world's reaction against him struck him down. It is an impressive fact that all the great French romantics—those powerful natures who seemed, in imagination and thought, to start again upon that lyrical voyage across History and the World which the hero had accomplished in action—Hugo, Balzac, Dumas, Vigny, Michelet, George Sand, Sainte-Beuve, Corot, Barye, Delacroix, Auguste Comte, Barbier, Mérimée, Berlioz, Daumier, Proud'hon—were born between those two dates, 1796 and 1809; that in England, obstinate in refusing to lay down her arms until Napoleon was overthrown, Keats, Carlyle, Macaulay, Stuart Mill, both the Brownings, Darwin, Tennyson and Dickens were born during the same period; that Mendelssohn, Schumann and Wagner were born at the moment when the whole of Germany was stiffening against him in suffering and anger; that Chopin, the offspring of a French father and a Polish mother, was born at a time when the Polish Andromeda regarded Napoleon as a Perseus descending from the heavens; that Leopardi was born at the moment when the Italian campaign which so deeply stirred the spirit of the peninsula was ending; that Mazzini and Garibaldi were born at the hour when, under Napoleon's hand, their country was crystallizing into unity for the first time. It is an impressive fact, finally, that Pushkin, Glinka and Gogol were born during the years when Russia took up arms and entered into conflict with him; Turgeniev, Dostoievsky and Tolstoi during the first years following the slow return to sleep of a Russia which was regarded as having been victorious over him who was invincible and the arbiter of a Europe which she imagined she could regenerate.

In the immense vortex which was produced by the apparition of the man charged by France to infuse the revolutionary fever into the spirit of Europe, and by God, if God exists, to propound to the heart of Europe the tragic problem of the destiny of mankind, the personal emotions which he inspired had a decisive effect upon the evolution of intellect, the orientation of ideas and the entire spiritual structure of a century that has proved the most fertile in inventions, in research and in inquiry in all recorded history. Chateaubriand's jealousy was only a kind of secret programme traceable to outbursts of patriotic or republican thunder or of hymns to solitude, and to a proud falling back upon that internal influence of lyricism, as master of the world, which the English Lake poets, Coleridge and Wordsworth, moreover, had already employed during the madness and disorder of the war. On their side Southey extolled the loyalty of the English soldiers and sailors, Ühland and Rückert took up the lyre of Tyrteus to urge the German people against the monster, and Byron, hiding his envy beneath his hatred, stooped to compare Napoleon with an incestuous pirate wandering the seas; while on our side Lamartine, Vigny, Hugo, Quinet, Barbier and Balzac, divided between admiration and anger, composed an apocalyptic or romantic picture of a man so formidable that it seemed to them that no one could henceforth compare himself with him without experiencing the feeling that he had failed in his life. Stendhal admitted his own defeat, and for that reason, perhaps, he alone was successful; penetrating the hero-worship which the holy alliance of autocracy, oligarchy, feudalism and the Church had reversed, and arriving at once at the social hypocrisy of it all, he founded a new ethical system by taking Napoleon as his example.

3

In the course of the century which began with Napoleon, a series of important encounters seems to have taken place between the unusual turn of mind which the example of his destiny induced in those who were won over by it and the philosophic trend inherited from the preceding century and precipitated upon the continent by his strength. One is surprised, to say no more than that, when one opens a book of literary history, to find that this fact is but rarely mentioned, and even then scrappily, in connection with such and such a writer, or with one of his books or with a chapter in one of his books. But it is never mentioned with the fullness which a general phenomenon deserves: with that given, for example, to the life of St. Francis of Assisi, albeit his influence was confined to a few Italian provinces, whereas Europe and the whole world were affected by Napoleon. Rousseau had awakened romanticism in men's sensibilities; Napoleon propagated in their imaginations all its exterior pretexts, gates opening suddenly upon the East, Italy, Germany, Spain, immense avenues leading into History and Legend, miraculous adventures, a revelation of the power and the rights of the individual bearing some splendid passion in his heart. And it was not to be long before romanticism outstripped the pessimistic conception of the world. Already its artists—men like Chateaubriand, Byron, Schubert, and, later on, Vigny, Leopardi, Berlioz and Delacroix—were instinctively disturbing its origins in the melancholy-minded. After the brief illusion caused by the first acts of the French Revolution, a great wave of metaphysical despair surged up again in men's souls and at the same time an unmeasured individualism perceived frontiers which would never be crossed. Napoleon was the rock upon which were broken all the hopes attracted thither by the beam of his lighthouse. Poets recognized that they were powerless to raise their pride to the level of a life such as his, which was itself powerless to prevail to the end over a hostile accumulation of circumstances, or, eventually, over death. Philosophers, confronted, as a result of Kant's analysis, with the finality of nothingness, pointed out the severe check which the necessity of his historic rôle was imposing upon the moral idol, the purity of which had been tarnished for ever by his glory. This was the first stage, thoroughly romantic; and it was Schopenhauer, before anyone else, who tried to go beyond it by suggesting, at the very moment when the hero was about to die,[1] that the world was a spectacle shown to the soul of the individual by the strength that is in him, a strength into which Napoleon had already poured his vision of the world and which was about to be renewed by German and Russian music and French painting.

Hero-worship was the second stage. According to Carlyle and Emerson the hero's strength imposes upon our consciousness of the world the vision which such strength makes of it. Between them they set up fifteen effigies of heroes, and of these Napoleon is the only one, except Shakespeare, who figures in both their books. That would have delighted Goethe, who was himself included, and who actually compared Napoleon with Shakespeare, but who would not have approved of their Puritan reservations, in which, subsequently, Ibsen and Tolstoi, and sometimes even Whitman, were likewise involved. To get free of them, yet another stage was necessary. Already Carlyle, without understanding whither his important pronouncement might lead later on, was asserting that the hero, whoever he might be, and from wherever he might have come, was charged with the re-establishment of order, and that in opposition to a dispossessed dynasty Napoleon represented Divine Right.

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[1] *The World as Will* dates from 1819.

Between whiles, the development of another form of research brought fresh materials to this genesis of mind. It is interesting to notice the character of the generation which appeared in France after the wars of the Empire, a generation consisting of men and women who had lived through the end of the drama, through those despairing efforts in Russia and Saxony and Champagne and at Waterloo. Nervous tension was as strong as ever, but enthusiasm was dead. A kind of recoil took place in men's souls, and the atmosphere of the Restoration and the *bourgeois* monarchy in which that generation grew up was not calculated to renew or to exalt its morale. Claude Bernard, Pasteur, Gobineau, Millet, Courbet, Flaubert, Baudelaire, Rénan, Charcot, Taine, Carpeaux, were born in the course of the fifteen years which followed the reflux of the exhausted bands which, pell-mell with the Cossacks, were returning from Moscow. The noble pessimism which cradled their elders, envious of the master's glory, above the abysses of lyrical contemplation, took on quite another aspect; it was bitter and sarcastic, meticulous and crotchety; it sought to hide its despair under the positivism of formulæ, the obstinacy of simplist beliefs, the irony of attitudes, the scepticism of conclusions. A studious generation, rather cross-grained, academic, too precise or too undecided, as indicated already by Stendhal's disciple, Mérimée, but not daring to follow him to the end. A generation of scholars which, in its disillusioned vigour, was to end in the most complete materialism, or, as a protest against its own discoveries, was to seek an artificial paradise in drugs and introspection. A stoical and yet an accursed generation, wherein Claude Bernard and Baudelaire, without knowing it, received the sacrament through the poetry of matter investigated with passion and illuminated and made spiritual by the flame of mystical sensuality and the fire of intellect. A generation still more pessimistic than its predecessor, since it did not retrieve its lost god under its scalpel and since its lyricism was submerged by the accumulation of the blood which it watched flow, of the debauchery which it prolonged, and of the perfumes and music with which it encompassed its pain. . . . But a generation, nevertheless, which gathered together elements of renewed hope by putting in Man's hands an instrument for investigation and conquest of which he is as yet scarcely beginning to suspect the power and the value.

An attempt at optimism—falling rather flat, to speak truthfully—of which the point of departure some forty years ago was the unexpected success of the applications of science, experienced a serious check, but one which was more apparent than real. People made the mistake of trying to reconstitute on the immediate social terrain the hope which had been smashed by the death of God, whilst deifying the regenerative virtue of the instrument which science brought forward. Now this hope cannot be fixed anywhere but in the ability of man to imagine the instrument and to develop, partly by means of the instrument itself, the ceaselessly growing complexity of his insatiable desires. When Nietzsche, passing the third stage—that of pessimism—suggested to despairing intellect that there was an incentive for renewed happiness in the " will-to-power," it is my belief that the spectacle of the scientific civilization which was growing up round him had something to do with that beneficial intuition —after the manner of the air which one breathes without noticing that one is doing so and which revivifies one's blood in spite of the deadly effect which it may have on lungs which are too weak to stand it. For though science, like all myths, produces ruins and provokes disasters, it is the most efficacious means of enhancing Man's greatness: it is capable of rebuilding every ruin, of surviving every disaster; it is tireless in inventing new myths so that his hope may not die.

Now all the victories which have been won by science and of which earlier epochs knew nothing—I refer to the rise of the *bourgeoisie* in England and France and the beginning of their capture of the whole world (as celebrated by Balzac and justified by John Stuart Mill), German realism, economic imperialism, the modern poem of American energy—all these victories, whether one is denouncing their crimes or extolling their benefits, go back to the example of the parvenu of genius whom Emerson called " the Democrat Incarnate " and whose life, in a final analysis, sanctifies the morality of conflict and condemns the immorality of ease. On the day when a few persons realized that one man had been able to grow to unlimited heights, to raise men above themselves, to let loose upon the world an impetuous stream of new forces and new ideas—and all this against a social system and, above all, against a *moral system* which were age-old—on that day Napoleon's spiritual sphere of attraction really began to take effect. Stendhal's immoralism set the courage, the pride and the foresight of the hero against a combination of social hypocrisies. Dostoievsky's Slav temperament perceived that there would be no pity or love or beauty or justice in the world if passion and energy and the criminal impulse disappeared from it first. Whitman's unanimism accepted in reality everything in man which makes his heart wider and more enterprising. Then Nietzsche came, and united these scattered voices by asserting that the instinct of domination, which is common to all men, can have no other limits, in Man's continuous ascent, except his own power to realize himself. In the mystery of the vast unity of spirits wherein the task of the poet is to sanctify the appetites of class, of caste and of race, created in turn or simultaneously in the careless play of life's decrees, there gradually arises a fresh consciousness of the world and its destiny. And it is to be noted that in actual fact the scholars and the philosophers are working in their own sphere to justify these appetites. Darwin patiently expounded the doctrine of the survival of the fittest, and Spencer transplanted the whole of it on to the ground of psychology and sociology. In politics Gobineau asserted that the right of a people to act as it chooses is subordinate to the aptitude for government possessed by certain chosen races. Karl Marx sought to prove that utility and the power of production give sovereignty to the producer on the social terrain ; while syndicalism, in its turn, proclaimed the plastic and constructive strength of an association of interests. In the sphere of circumstances and facts, American pragmatism set the passivity of the man who immobilizes himself in pure reason below the victorious movement of the man who asserts himself in action.

All this will one day lose its contradictions and its sharp angles and resolve itself into a living synthesis, to the lyrical emotion of which not even Verhaeren himself has yet attained. In short, will not the trend of these ideas be to acclaim conflict as such, asserting that it is noble simply because it *is* conflict and justifying the access to a triumphant life of the victorious element as against that which has been defeated ? For a hundred years the shade of one man has been hovering over this vast movement, which is tending to substitute a spiritual and still embryonic system in place of another spiritual system which has died because its task is finished. Human Rights, Divine Rights, have changed their camp and their character. Since Napoleon's time it is no longer a question of knowing who is justified according to Human Rights, Human Rights being only an acquired habit, but of knowing who is justified according to Divine Right, Divine Right being the strength to become divine.

4

I do not think that there will ever be a Napoleonic myth made to blossom in the loftiest minds after having germinated in the coarsest of sentimental popular legends, and having been brought forth in the hearts of poets charged with collecting them. Not that that is entirely impossible, and not that I do not feel a certain admiration for those who put aside this hypothesis as unworthy of our spirit. Did not the intellectuals of two thousand years ago reject with disgust the story that prostitutes, fishermen and slaves were propounding a remedy for needs which they themselves did not even perceive? Did they realize the approach of the Barbarians and of a vast throng of virgin minds which the Old World would be obliged to fertilize? Slaves, fishermen and prostitutes are more numerous than ever. And the Barbarians are coming. Where will the aristocracy which will spring from these ardent masses find the wine for which they will clamour when the fatigue of chaos increases their thirst? I am not absolutely sure that it will be fitting to demand it from the prophets and apostles whose confused voices we have just heard. But can anything else be suggested?

What I do know is this: a myth of any kind, whether it be gentle or terrible, whether it glorifies force or love, is always conceived and born, it always waxes and wanes, in blood. For in either case it is the attacker, and resistance awaits it. And without attack and resistance there would be no life. Every theology and every philosophy in the history of Mankind denounces the conflict between liberty and fate and then, through an inconceivable aberration, infers the victory either of the one or of the other. In both cases, what would become of history, if history is regarded as conflict? Conflict, it is true, is not war only. And war could disappear if Man found the means to proceed without it to the limits of the collective drama and of the heroic or unhealthy passions which are roused in him in order to foster conflict. But up till now this means has escaped him and will continue to do so for a long time to come, no doubt. And we can no more imagine history without wars and revolutions than we can imagine civilization without art, and life without love. It would be a history devoid of events. And there are no events in life except through drama.

Nearly all those who hold the historical stage and work in direct contact with action derive their importance, in default of genius, from events. Poets, on the other hand—the theatre of the permanent internal drama which maintains Mankind in agony and hope—create events by projecting this drama into men's minds and hearts. It is a rare thing to find a man who is governed by events, but who, because he derives from them a spiritual power capable of subjecting them to unheard-of transformations whence come new events, appears to the world as a demiurge, above good and evil, and who tries, even in his lifetime, to build the world after the vision which he has conceived of it. Whether the future will recognize it or no, whether it will curse him for it or glorify him, Napoleon was such a man. The future, whatever it may bring forth, will not be able to ignore him.

But we remain so dependent upon our Christian habits that it seems to us impossible for a popular mysticism to be launched in any other form than as an appeal to peace and gentleness. Yet the myths of Hellas, of Scandinavia, of Israel, of India, do not depend upon a renouncement of life. It is indeed something of an historical surprise that twenty centuries ago the worn-out Greek and Jewish civilization was imposed upon the young and wholly innocent West and produced the Middle Ages, whose greatness was determined by that dramatic contrast which, in the fury of unbridled brutal passions, maintained a distracted hope in a world of moral voluptuousness impossible of exhaustion. The myth, at least in its elementary form, has gone for ever, perhaps. But it has been replaced by mythical abstractions which are just as cruel, and more so, doubtless, for him who would realize them. Peace, happiness, justice are amongst these. I do not know if we must regard them as the final stage of the spiritual effort of Man towards that unstable equilibrium which is the only peace, the only happiness, the only justice accessible to him, and which up till now he has only been able to realize in flashes through war, crime, and despair. I am not sure that this same equilibrium will not be deified one day. But if that day comes I believe that there will be celebrated in some Eleusis reserved for initiates of the supreme European Spirit a religion which will do justice to the man whose deeds showed that harmony is a function, not of love alone, but with it of the energy which is always striving to establish a magnanimous system in the drama of the passions.

Appendix

Note 1. Two books—Gourgaud's and Bourrienne's—above all others enlighten us on this point. With Gourgaud, a vain, morose, uncomprehending man, a jealous and tyrannical lover of his master, the tone is not at all the same as with Las Cases, who was intelligent enough, and more educative, and who never resisted him. Nor is it at all the same with Bourrienne, who was spiteful and ungrateful, but who, to appear impartial, made an effort to be sincere, as with Madame d'Abrantes, who was a vain, gossiping coquette imbued with the family spirit. In forming an opinion, each of them, as one might expect, yielded to his or her own temperament, rancour and prejudices. Only one person possessed a vision as wide as it was far-seeing and considered the man as a whole, with distinction and purity of motive. That person was Roederer. One feels that among those who talked to Napoleon, he was the only one who understood what he meant, the only one, too, before whom Napoleon, feeling himself understood, unbosomed himself and showed himself as he really was. The conversation with Goethe must have been on similar lines too. All the others missed the great things, which passed over their heads; or else he himself remained reticent in their presence.

Note 2. "It was in vain," Rapp tells us, "that he tried to be severe; his nature was too strong for him and always prevailed over him."

Note 3. Joseph wrote to him one day to remind him that he (Joseph) was the elder: "*The elder? He? Referring to our father's vineyard, no doubt.*"

Note 4. "*When the first tussle was over their perseverance and their obstinacy were always too much for me: I gave in and they did what they liked with me.*"

Note 5. "*You like to fawn upon people and accept their ideas,*" he wrote to Joseph. "*But I prefer people to please me and obey my ideas.*"

Note 6. And later, when he was at St. Helena: "*Let them call me what they choose; they will not prevent me from being myself.*" That comes from the bottom of his heart. But before the English and in front of his servants, he would not give in. He insisted on people giving him his title; otherwise he forbade them to appear before him.

Note 7. "*Ambitious men with second-class brains,*" he said, "*never have anything but mischievous ideas.*"

Note 8. When his lieutenants were congratulating him after Marengo, he said: "*Yes; in less than two years I have captured Cairo, Milan, Paris. And yet if I were to die to-morrow I should not have even half a page in a history of the universe.*" In 1804 he said to Roederer: "*I have not yet done enough to be known.*" And on another occasion: "*What will history say? What will posterity think?*"

Note 9. "*Misfortunes,*" he said at St. Helena, "*also have their heroism and their glory. Adversity was lacking in my career. If I had remained on the throne, among the clouds of my omnipotence, I should* *have become a problem for many people. To-day, thanks to misfortune, they can judge me stark naked."*

Note 10. "To will and to do were one for him" (Bourrienne).

Note 11. "*Man,*" he also said, "*only distinguishes himself in life by dominating the character which nature has given him or by creating one for himself through his imagination and being able to modify it according to the obstacles he encounters.*"

Note 12. "*One only enjoys oneself when one is in danger.*"

Note 13. "The chief cause of his power," says Goethe in his *Discourses with Eckermann*, "was that men were certain of reaching their goal when they were under his orders."

Note 14. "Bonaparte did not believe in men's virtue, but he believed in their honour" (Bourrienne).

Note 15. "The 18th Brumaire saved France" (La Fayette).

Note 16. He "beat the Republic to death and saved the Revolution" (Albert Vandal).

Note 17. "*For my part,*" Napoleon used to say with reference to the conduct of England, "*I never did anything of that sort, and up till the unfortunate affair with Spain, which in any case came after the Copenhagen episode, I can say that my morality remains unassailable. My transactions may have been peremptory and dictatorial, but they were never treacherous.*"

Note 18. This saying is well known. Madame de

Staël having asked him what kind of woman was in his opinion the most remarkable, he answered: "*The one who produces the most children.*" May I be permitted to recall another saying, even more expressive and moral—yes, moral!—but far more coarse, although the perpetrator was never regarded as a vulgar man, or a misogynist or a tyrant. A middle-aged lady, a feminist, was enumerating to Renoir the qualities which, in her view, made woman superior to man: disinterestedness, the spirit of sacrifice, kindliness, generosity, morality, frankness, character, intellect, genius. . . . "And a beautiful body!" added Renoir.

Note 19. "*Chauteaubriand received the sacred fire from nature. His style is that of the prophet.*"

Note 20. And also: "*It is absurd to stifle the Press. Of that I am convinced.*"

Note 21. And on another occasion: "*It is the civil spirit, not military force, which governs and, indeed, commands. Calculation? Knowledge of men? Eloquence? Civil qualities.*"

Note 22. And again: "*The head of the State must not be the head of a party.*"

Note 23. In a letter to his brother Jerome, King of Westphalia: "*What the German peoples are impatiently looking for is that individuals who are not of the nobility, but who are talented, should have an equal right to your consideration and to employment under you; that is to say, that every kind of bondage and all intermediary ties between the sovereign and the lowest class of his people should be entirely abolished. The benefits of the Napoleonic Code, the publication of pro-*

ceedings, the establishment of trial by jury, will be distinctive characteristics of your monarchy; and, to tell you my whole thoughts on the matter, I am counting more on the effect of these for the extension and the strengthening of this monarchy than on the results of the greatest of victories. Your people must enjoy a liberty, an equality, a well-being unknown to the other peoples of Germany, and such liberal government must bring about, in one way or another, the most salutary changes in the system of the confederation and in the power of your monarchy. This method of government will prove a stronger barrier to protect you from Prussia than the Elbe, fortified towns, or the protection of France. What people would want to return to the arbitrary Prussian government when it had once tasted the benefits of a wise and liberal administration? The peoples of Germany, like those of France, Italy and Spain, want equality and liberal ideas. . . . I have conducted the affairs of Europe for many years now, and I have had occasion to become convinced that the chatter of privileged persons is contrary to the general opinion. Be a constitutional king. . . ."

"*Though they are scattered, there are in Europe,*" he said later on, "*more than thirty million French, fifteen million Spaniards, fifteen million Italians, thirty million Germans. . . . I would have liked to make each of these peoples into a single and definite nation. . . . Such a state of affairs would have given the best chance of producing everywhere the unification of the Codes and that of principles, opinions, feelings, views and interests. . . . Then . . . perhaps one might have been allowed to dream of applying the American Constitution or the Amphictyons of Greece to this great European* *family . . . and what a perspective would there not then have been of strength and greatness and joys and prosperity ! . .* ." As regards the French, he declared, the thing had been done. As regards Spain : "*The amalgamation of fifteen million Spaniards is almost complete. . . . As I have not subdued the Spaniards, it will be argued henceforth that they are unsubduable.*" As regards Italy : "*It would take me twenty years to re-establish the Italian nation. . . . The amalgamation of the Germans had to go more slowly. All I have done is to simplify their monstrously complicated system. . . . However that may be, this amalgamation will come sooner or later by force of circumstances. The impulse has been given, and after my fall and the disappearance of my system, I do not think that any other great equilibrium will be possible in Europe except through the amalgamation and the confederation of the great nations.*"

Note 24. "Thanks to the genius of the Emperor," Laplace used to say, "the whole of Europe will soon form one immense family, united by the same religion and the same code of laws."

Note 25. This is what he himself said about history and the way in which it is written. I do not think that anyone has ever spoken with more psychological tact about the secret motives which, in men's intentions, determine historical events and by that fact make history half unintelligible to us :

"*This historical truth, which is so much in evidence and which each of us hastens to evoke, is too often merely a phrase : it is an impossibility at the moment when events are taking place, in the heat of conflicting passions ; and if, subsequently, people are in agreement about it,* *it is because the participants, the opponents, are no longer with us. But what is historical truth, for the greater part of the time? A story that it has been agreed to tell, as someone very ingeniously said.*

"In all these matters there are two essential parts which are quite distinct: material facts and moral intentions. It would seem that the material facts ought to be incontrovertible; and yet do two separate accounts of them ever tally? Some of them are argued about eternally. As to moral intentions, what means are there of discovering them, even assuming that the men who recount them are speaking in good faith? And what happens if men are influenced by bad faith and self-interest and passion? I give an order, but who can read my inmost thoughts and know my true intention? Yet every one proceeds to take that order, measure it on his own scale, and fit it in with his own plan and his own individual system. Note the varying colours which an intriguer, whom it annoys, will give to it, or, on the other hand, the way he will twist it to make it of use to him in his intrigue. There will be, likewise, the important personage to whom the ministers or the sovereign may have mentioned something in confidence in connection with the subject; there will be, likewise again, the many idlers in the palace who, having nothing better to do than listen at doors, invent things, in default of hearing them. And each of them will be so certain of what he is saying! And the people lower down in the scale who hang on the lips of these privileged persons will in their turn be so certain of it. Thus memoirs and agenda and bons mots and drawing-room anecdotes run their course. . . .

"Yet such, nevertheless, is History! I have known

people argue with me, with ME, *about my ideas in my own battles, dispute the intention of my orders and pronounce judgment against me. Is not that the denial of the created thing even when it is faced with its creator? Nevertheless, my contradictor, my opponent, will have his partisans. It is this fact which has deterred me from writing my private memoirs and expressing my personal feelings, wherein the finer shades of my private character would have been displayed naturally. I could not have descended to a confession after the manner of Jean-Jacques; it might have been attacked by the first-comer. Moreover, I did not expect to have to do more than talk about my public deeds to you who are here. I know well enough that even these accounts can be contradicted; for what man on earth is there, whatever may be his reasons and whatever the force and power of those reasons, whom the opposing party does not attack and contradict? But in the eyes of those who are wise and impartial, who have given thought to the matter and reasoned it out, my voice, after all, is of as much worth as anyone else's, and I have little fear of the final decision. From now onwards there will exist so many lights that when passions have disappeared and the clouds have passed I can trust in the dazzling blaze which will remain.*

" But how many mistakes there will be in between! People will frequently regard me as having been deep and subtle when, perhaps, the matter in question was the simplest in the world. I will be saddled with projects which I never had. It will be asked whether or no I was aiming at universal monarchy. There will be long arguments as to whether my absolute authority and my arbitrary actions were derived from my character or from my calculations, whether they were produced by

my own inclination or by force of circumstances, whether my constant wars were due to my taste for fighting or whether I was dragged into them in my own defence, and whether my vast ambition, which has been such a subject of reproach, was guided by a craving for domination, or a thirst for glory, or desire, or love of the general well-being—for my ambition deserves to be considered in all these different aspects. People will debate on the motives which decided me in the catastrophe of the Duc d'Enghien and a host of other events. People will often be puzzled and will twist things round, though they were quite natural and entirely right.

"It is not for me, here and now, to deal in detail with all these matters; that would be a plea in my defence—and I despise that. If, by what I have said on matters in general, the uprightness and sagacity of the historians find the wherewithal to form a just and true opinion on what I have not mentioned, so much the better. But, in contrast to these feeble sparks, how many false lights will assail them!—from the stories and lies of the major schemers, all of whom had their aims, their underhand dealing, their particular negotiations, which, mixing with the true facts, complicate everything inextricably, to the revelations, the 'portfolios,' the very assertions of my ministers, who, though honest enough, were obliged to tell not so much what was the truth as what they believed to be the truth. For was there any one of them who knew the whole of my thoughts in general? Their particular share, for the greater part of the time, was merely to be component parts of a great whole of which they had no conception. All they saw, therefore, was that face of the prism which was nearest them. Again, how could they have understood the case? Could they see it plainly

and fully? Was it not itself split up? Yet there is probably not one of them who, judging things from the way they had struck him, would not have been prepared to put forward the fantastic result of his own plans as my true system. Hence, again, comes in the agreed-upon story which is called History, and it cannot be otherwise, though it is true that, since there are several persons concerned, it is probable that they will be far from being in agreement. Finally, in their positive assertions they will prove themselves cleverer than I am; for very frequently I should have found it very hard to state truthfully what my complete thoughts were. It is well known that I was not opposed to adapting circumstances to my own ideas, but that as a rule I allowed circumstances to lead me. Now, who can be ready in advance for chance circumstances or unexpected incidents? How many times have I not been obliged to make a radical alteration! Moreover, I conducted affairs much more by general views than by settled plans. The mass of common interests and what I believed to be the good of the greater number—those were the anchors to which I was fixed, but round which for the greater part of the time I floated haphazard."

Note 26. He was asserting that "Napoleon" means "*the lion of the desert.*"

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